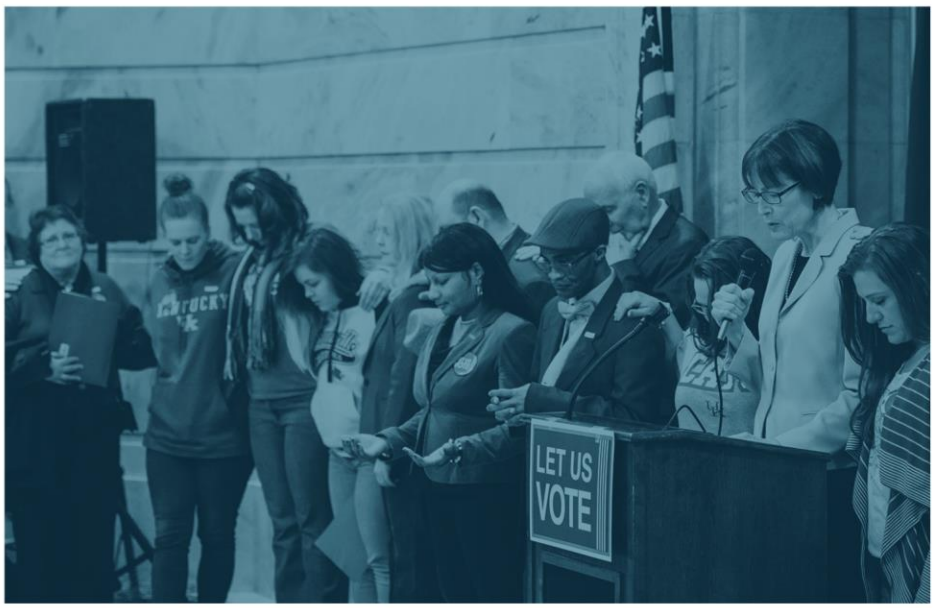
APRIL 2018

THE SOULS OF POOR FOLK

AUDITING AMERICA 50 YEARS AFTER THE **POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN** CHALLENGED RACISM, POVERTY, THE WAR ECONOMY/MILITARISM AND OUR NATIONAL MORALITY



Institute for Policy Studies

Poor People's Campaign A NATIONAL CALL FOR MORAL REVIVAL

KAIROS THE CENTER FOR RELIGIONS, RIGHTS, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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"WE COME TO YOU AS REPRESENTATIVES OF BLACK, INDIAN, MEXICAN-AMERICAN, PUERTO RICAN AND WHITE-AMERICANS WHO ARE THE TOO LONG FORGOTTEN, HUNGRY AND JOBLESS OUTCASTS IN THIS LAND OF PLENTY. WE COME BECAUSE POOR FATHERS AND MOTHERS WANT A HOUSE TO LIVE IN THAT WILL PROTECT THEIR CHILDREN AGAINST THE BITTER WINTER COLD, THE SEARING HEAT OF SUMMER AND THE RAIN THAT NOW TOO OFTEN COMES IN THROUGH THE CRACKS IN OUR ROOFS AND WALLS. WE HAVE COME HERE TO SAY THAT WE DON'T THINK IT'S TOO MUCH TO ASK FOR A DECENT PLACE TO LIVE IN AT REASONABLE PRICES IN A COUNTRY WITH A GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT OF 800 BILLION DOLLARS. WE DON'T THINK IT'S TOO RADICAL TO WANT TO HELP CHOOSE THE TYPE OF HOUSING AND THE LOCATION. WE DON'T THINK IT'S ASKING FOR PIE IN THE SKY TO WANT TO LIVE IN NEIGHBORHOODS WHERE OUR FAMILIES CAN LIVE AND GROW UP WITH DIGNITY, SURROUNDED BY THE KIND OF FACILITIES AND SERVICES THAT OTHER AMERICANS TAKE FOR GRANTED."

- COMMITTEE OF 100, STATEMENTS OF DEMANDS FOR RIGHTS OF THE POOR, 1968

"WITH THE REALITIES OF SYSTEMIC RACISM, SYSTEMIC POVERTY, ECOLOGICAL DEVASTATION, THE WAR ECONOMY AND THE OFTEN FALSE MORAL NARRATIVE OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM, WE ARE IN A MOMENT IN TIME WHICH WE NEED A DEEPLY MORAL, DEEPLY CONSTITUTIONAL, ANTI-RACIST, ANTI-POVERTY, PRO-LABOR, TRANSFORMATIVE FUSION COALITION, WHERE PEOPLE OF ALL DIFFERENT RACES, COLORS AND CREEDS COME TOGETHER AND WORK TOGETHER TO ENGAGE IN MORAL DIRECT ACTION, MASSIVE VOTER MOBILIZATION, AND POWER BUILDING FROM THE BOTTOM UP, STATE BY STATE AND EVEN IN THE U.S. CAPITOL. WE NEED THIS TO CHANGE THE NARRATIVE AND INSIST THAT WE WILL NO LONGER ENGAGE IN ATTENTION VIOLENCE AGAINST THE POOR AND OTHER INTERLOCKING INJUSTICES THAT CONNECT TO POVERTY."

- REV. DR. WILLIAM J. BARBER, II, CO-CHAIR,
POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN: A NATIONAL CALL FOR MORAL REVIVAL, 2018

"IMMIGRANTS, MUSLIMS, HOMELESS PEOPLE, AND YOUTH ARE UNDER ATTACK. THE POOR ARE FACING SEVERE CUTS TO BASIC SOCIAL SERVICES. MILLIONS OF PEOPLE ARE LIVING WITHOUT CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION SERVICES. VOTING RIGHTS ARE BEING SUPPRESSED AND WARS ARE BEING WAGED ACROSS THE WORLD AND INTENSIFYING. THESE AND MANY OTHER CRISES MEAN IT IS URGENT WE BUILD A POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN TODAY."

- REV. DR. LIZ THEOHARIS, CO-CHAIR, POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN: A NATIONAL CALL FOR MORAL REVIVAL, 2017

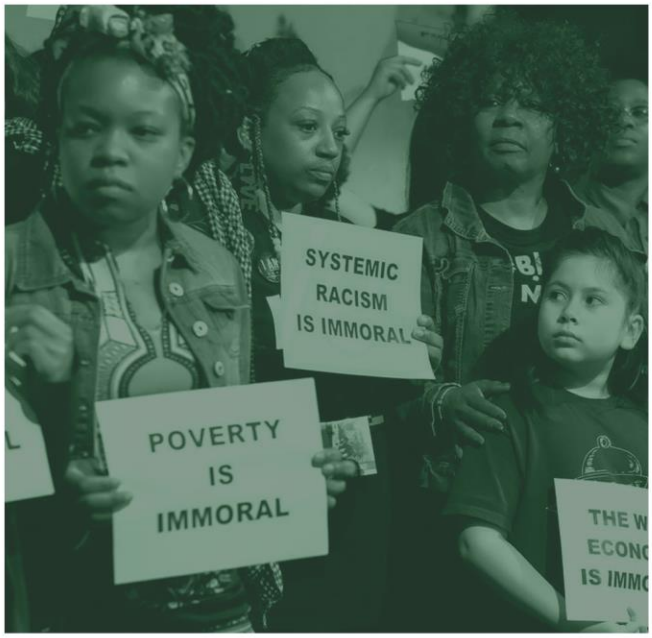

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD 1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 5
INTRODUCTION 15
SYSTEMIC RACISM 24
POVERTY AND INEQUALITY 40
THE WAR ECONOMY AND MILITARISM 68
ECOLOGICAL DEVASTATION 89
CONCLUSION 112
APPENDIX 1 114
APPENDIX 2 116
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 117

FOREWORD

THE SOULS OF POOR FOLK: AUDITING AMERICA 50 YEARS AFTER THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN CHALLENGED RACISM, POVERTY, WAR ECONOMY/MILITARISM AND OUR NATIONAL MORALITY

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The Souls of Poor Folk traces the 50 years since 1968, when Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and thousands of Americans, alarmed at their government's blindness to human need, launched the Poor People's Campaign. As they marched up from the nation's neglected shadows, Dr. King paused to answer a plea for support from sanitation workers on strike in Memphis. There an assassin snatched his life on April 4th.

Broken-hearted, this "freedom church of the poor" gathered by the thousands in Washington. They erected "Resurrection City," their encampment on the National Mall, to demand that their government address bitter poverty in the wealthiest nation in the world. They confronted fundamental questions about America's moral and Constitutional vision for all of its people, regardless of their wealth, race, gender or national origin. They demanded attention to the hungry children and inadequate schools from Appalachia to the Mississippi Delta to the devastated inner cities across America. They made moral witness against America's long, pointless, and immoral war in Vietnam, and tried hard to be heard as they carried their testimony forward into public life. The hard history that compelled them to "pray with their feet," as Rabbi Abraham Heschel said, also compelled many Americans to ask whether the republic for which they stood would ever stand for them.

50 years later, beset by deepening poverty, ecological devastation, systemic racism, and an economy harnessed to seemingly endless war, "The Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival" likewise beckons our nation to higher ground. We call upon our society to see the predicaments of the most vulnerable among us and to halt the destruction of America's moral vision. Hundreds of thousands across the nation today stand on the shoulders of that "freedom church" of 1968. We turn to America's history—and to the realities of our own time—not to wallow in a fruitless nostalgia of pain. We seek instead to redeem a democratic promise enshrined in the U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, yet even more deeply rooted in the living ingredients of our own lives and embodied in the countless and largely unacknowledged grassroots activists who have labored to lift those founding documents to their full meaning. We come to remind our nation what truths we hold to be self-evident. We come to remind our nation what values we hold dear. In Washington and at state capitols around the country, we hope to make a new moral witness from our love for what Maya Angelou called "these yet to be united states."

The Souls of Poor Folk is an empirical study that brings us toward an honest confrontation with our own history—how our path has unfolded since 1968 and how our nation trembles today for lack of moral vision. It summons our highest moral aspirations and diagnoses our deepest national ailments over five decades. It draws on academic research but also upon the testimonies of human beings battered by harmful public policies. Alongside the carefully assembled facts, you will hear the voices of America's poor themselves, many of them now joining this movement. "Not everything that is faced can be changed," James Baldwin reminds us, "But nothing can be changed until it is faced."

The Souls of Poor Folk emphasizes the complex relationships between and across systemic racism, persistent poverty, the war economy and its inevitable militarism, and the ecological devastation from which none can escape. These issues tangle in our lives. If you are, for instance, a mother in

Flint, Michigan, the decision of your government to create and then ignore your lead-poisoned water inflicts an environmental crisis, a health crisis, and a jobs crisis, but also a crisis of democracy. None of the families in Flint whose children are exposed to dangerous levels of lead voted to endanger their little ones. Those in power, however, not only made decisions that poisoned the water, but, when informed about this negligence, intentionally chose not to address or even announce the threat of lasting damage this posed to these children; not because this pollution did not matter, but because these people did not matter.

The issues confronted in *The Souls of Poor Folk* drive the day-to-day struggles of the poor and dispossessed. These issues demand that we dispel the notion that systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation and the war economy hurt only a small segment of our society. More than 40,600,000 Americans subsist below the poverty line; this report additionally shows that there are close to 140 million people dealing with some combination of these crises every day. Nearly half of our population cannot afford a $400 emergency, which presents a structural crisis of national proportion that ties poverty to things like healthcare and housing. The devastation cuts across race, gender, age, and geography. It has carved a dangerous and deepening moral chasm in America and inflicts a tragic loss of purpose, even among the affluent.

50 years ago this spring, Dr. King and a multi-colored quilt of God's children invoked America's better angels, confident that the keys to our predicaments lay in the hearts of our people. None of our diverse faith traditions celebrate denying food to hungry children or devoting trillions to war and pennies to want. No moral vision embraces the denial of healthcare to our fellow human beings. Many Americans appear to have forgotten their own values and become blind to the needs of other human beings, even those they may still hold in their hearts.

These deep forms of myopia reflect still deeper failures of memory. "The struggle of humanity against entrenched power," writes novelist Milan Kundera, "is the struggle of memory over forgetting." Few recall that the war in Vietnam drained away many of the resources for the War on Poverty, which did much but could have done much more. "Bombs dropped in Vietnam explode at home," Dr. King said. Fewer still recall the prophetic voice of the Poor People's Campaign and that Dr. King died organizing a nonviolent revolution to push America toward a social ethos grounded in love. "We are called upon to raise certain basic questions about the whole society," King preached before his assassination. "We must recognize that we can't solve our problem now until there is a radical redistribution of economic and political power." It is time that we turn to our past in order to understand our present, and then turn forward together to build a better future.

As shining and crucial the role of Dr. King and other notable leaders, neither the Poor People's Campaign of 1968 nor our cause of love, mercy and justice today rolled forward on the gifts of a great leader. Our victories in the timeless cause of love and democracy have always required the devotion of thousands of ordinary people, local communities, grassroots groups, prophetic churches, and organizing traditions. In that spirit, the new Poor People's Campaign will bring together people from all walks of life to the National Mall in Washington and to state capitols across the nation from May 13th to June 23st, 2018, just over forty days to demand that our country see the

poor in our streets, confront the damage to our natural environment, and ponder the ailments of a nation that year after year spends more money on endless war than on human need. The time has come to stand together and make a national call for moral revival.

"THE PRESCRIPTION FOR THE CURE RESTS WITH AN ACCURATE DIAGNOSIS OF THE DISEASE."

REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., 1967

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Souls of Poor Folk is an assessment of the conditions today and trends of the past 50 years in the United States. In 1967 and 1968, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., alongside a multiracial coalition of grassroots leaders, religious leaders, and other public figures, began organizing with poor and marginalized communities across racial and geographic divides. Together, they aimed to confront the underlying structures that perpetuated misery in their midst. The move towards a Poor People's Campaign was a challenge to the national morality: it was a movement to expose the injustice of the economic, political, and social systems in the U.S. during their time.

50 years later, *The Souls of Poor Folk* challenges us to take a look at how these conditions have changed since 1968. The stark findings draw from a wide variety of sources, including primary and secondary data as well as interviews with and testimonies by people who have been living through and responding to these changes on the ground. Their words offer deep insight for understanding these conditions and why these leaders feel compelled to call for a Poor People's Campaign today.

The facts, figures, and faces in these pages counter numerous myths about what is wrong with our society, including two of the most prevalent:

1. Poverty is the fault of the poor

There is an enduring narrative that if these millions of people just acted better, worked harder, complained less, and prayed more, they would be lifted up and out of their miserable conditions. This report demonstrates that what Dr. King called the "Triplets of Evil"—systemic racism, poverty, and the war economy and militarism—as well as the interrelated problem of ecological devastation, have deepened since 1968 because of structural and systemic reasons, rather than individual failures.

2. Despite our nation's abundance, there is not enough for all of us to survive and thrive

This report makes a clear case that the richest nation in the world has sufficient resources to protect the environment and ensure dignified lives for all its people. The problem is a matter of priorities, as more and more of our wealth flows into the pockets of a small but powerful few and into our bloated Pentagon budget.

The report also makes the case that the most pressing problems of our time cannot be tackled separately. It connects the attacks on voting rights to the attacks on basic needs like water, health care, living wages, and the shift towards the incarceration and criminalization of the poor, with disparate effects across race, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. It shows that

> ***"If we explore the interconnection of systemic racism, poverty, the war economy and ecological devastation, we see how systemic racism allows us to deny the humanity of others; by denying the humanity of others, we are given permission to exploit or exclude people economically; by exploiting and excluding people economically we are emboldened to abuse our military powers and, through violence and war, control resources; this quest for control of resources leads to the potential destruction of our entire ecosystem and everything living in it. And we see how the current moral narrative of our nation both justifies this cycle and distracts us from it."***
>
> Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis, Co-Chair of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival

our pursuit of wars not only costs countless lives abroad, but is also connected to domestic problems, including the gutting of public services, the decline in government accountability, and the poisoning of our water and air. It documents the decline of rural communities over the past 50 years, where hospitals are closing, jails are opening, and diseases that had been eradicated in the 20th century are cropping back up.

Moreover, *The Souls of Poor Folk* reminds us of the ongoing and emerging resistance and organizing that is compelling a change in our national priorities.

"In the economy of the 21st century, only a tiny percentage of the population is immune from the possibility that they could fall into poverty as a result of bad breaks beyond their own control. The American Dream is quickly becoming the American Illusion."

Prof. Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights

KEY FINDINGS

Systemic Racism

- **Legislative actions and legal decisions at the federal and state levels have severely restricted the ability of people of color, especially poor Black people, Latinx, and Native Americans, to participate in democratic processes.** This includes the 2013 *Shelby v. Holder* Supreme Court case, which gutted the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Further, 23 states have adopted some form of voter suppression law since 2010, and 25 states have pre-empted cities from passing minimum wage laws (many in response to successful grassroots living wage campaigns). In Michigan, emergency financial management laws have paved the way for state-appointed and unaccountable managers to sideline democratically elected local officials. Flint was under emergency management when city officials made decisions that poisoned the city's water supply.

> ***"They could not take our water away without taking our democracy first."***
>
> Claire McClinton, Flint Democracy Defense League

- **"Tough on crime" politics has led to increased policing of poor communities and a tenfold increase in annual federal discretionary spending on prisons since 1976**. The number of sentenced inmates of all races in U.S. state and federal prison grew from 187,914 in 1968 to 1,458,000 in 2016. People of color account for 66 percent of people in prison, while they make up only about 39 percent of the total population. And the number of citizens disenfranchised due to felony convictions has tripled, from 2 million in 1968 to 6.1 million in 2016, including one in thirteen Black adults.

- **Federal spending on immigration, deportation, and border policies increased from $2 billion to $17 billion and deportations increased tenfold between 1976 and 2015.** These anti-immigrant measures affect not only deportees and detainees, but also their communities and family members, who face greater difficulty in affording basic expenses, meeting rent, and paying for utilities.

Poverty

- **Restrictions on democratic participation are compounded by structural changes in employment towards a low-wage economy, tied to a decline in union membership.** At the time of the 1968 Poor People's Campaign, productivity and

> ***"It is a spiritually impoverished nation that permits infants and children to be the poorest Americans."***
>
> Marian Wright Edelman, Founder and President, Children's Defense Fund

wages had been rising in tandem for at least two decades. But beginning in the 1970s, employers no longer shared the benefits of improved productivity with their workers. Between 1973 and 2016, hourly compensation increased just 12.3 percent, while productivity increased 73.7 percent. This has been accompanied by anti-union policies like "right to work" laws that have undermined workers' power to bargain collectively. Between 1968 and 2017, the share of U.S. workers in unions fell from 24.9 percent to 10.7 percent.

- **Instead of going to workers, massive gains from economic growth have been going to a smaller and smaller share of society.** Since 1968, the top 1 percent's share of national income has nearly doubled while the official poverty rate for all U.S. families has merely inched up and down. The 400 wealthiest Americans now own more wealth than the bottom 64 percent of the U.S. population (or 204 million people).

- **Nearly 41 million Americans live below the federal poverty line.** In absolute terms, White people made up 42.5 percent of this population (17.3 million), and the next two largest groups are Latinx (11.1 million) at 27.4 percent, and Black Americans (9.2 million) at 22.7 percent. In relative terms, Native Americans and Alaska Natives have the highest poverty rate of any racial group, at 26.2 percent. Black people have the second-highest poverty rate, at 22 percent. This is followed by Latinx people (19.4 percent), White people (11 percent), and Asian Americans (10.1 percent).

- **Nearly 140 million people (43.5 percent) are either poor or low-income** under the alternative Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM), which goes beyond income to consider out-of-pocket expenses for food, clothing, housing and utilities, geographic disparities, and federal assistance. "Low income" in this context means a household making less than twice the poverty line.

- **Almost four in ten children spend at least one year of their lives in poverty, meaning that there has been a rise, also, in the number of poor families.** In 2016, households led by single mothers comprised almost 30 percent of families with incomes below the poverty line. Households led by Native women had the highest poverty rates (42.6 percent), followed by those headed by immigrant women (almost 42 percent), Latinx women (40.8 percent), Black women (38.8 percent) and White women (30.2 percent). LGBTQ people are disproportionately represented among the poor as well.

- **The scaling back of anti-poverty programs has contributed to the perception that government programs do not work.** By far the greatest reduction in federal spending for low-income families came with the passage of Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996, which eliminated Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and replaced it with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF drastically reduced resources available to families in poverty and imposed unrealistic work requirements. The AFDC program assisted 68 percent of poor families with children in 1996. Today, TANF assists only 23 percent of poor families with children. In all but 3 states, TANF benefits have declined since 1996, with monthly benefits in all 50 states equal to or below two-thirds of the federal poverty line. These changes in welfare were part of the overall shift towards a low-wage economy.

- **Housing, higher education, and health care costs have increased significantly.** Over the past 30 years, rents have gone up faster than income in nearly every urban area in the country. In

2016, there was no state or county in the nation where an individual earning the federal minimum wage of $7.25 an hour could afford a two-bedroom apartment at market rent. As of 2017, for every 100 extremely low-income renters, a mere 35 will find affordable housing.

- **Cuts in federal housing assistance and affordable, subsidized housing since the 1970s have contributed to rising structural homelessness.** A government survey of people who were homeless in 2017 found that 41 percent were Black, 47 percent were White, and 22 percent were Latinx. A majority of homeless families are headed by single women with young children. The problem is particularly acute for LGBTQ youth, who represent between five and ten percent of the nation's young people, but between 20 and 40 percent of the homeless youth population. A 2015 survey found that a much larger number of people, estimated at 2.5 million to 3.5 million, sleep in shelters or encampments at some point every year, while another estimated 7.4 million are on the brink of homelessness, having lost their own homes and transitioned into the homes of others.

- **Student debt levels have exploded, driven in part by the growth of high-cost, high-risk, for-profit colleges, which now make up nearly a third of new higher education opportunities.** Among for-profit college students, 64 percent are women, 52 percent are people of color, 50 percent have dependent children, and 51 percent work full-time while enrolled. Student debt now amounts to $1.34 trillion and affects about 44 million Americans.

> ***"There was a direct connection between the people that were living in subsidized housing, the massive cuts to affordable housing, and the need to open emergency shelter programs…And then we also saw a new category of poor people – homeless poor people – who were somehow different from all the other poor people. But the only difference between homeless poor people and housed poor people is that one is indoors and one is outdoors."***
>
> Paul Boden, director of the Western Regional Advocacy Project

- **Even under the Affordable Care Act, about 31 million people remain uninsured, including 4.6 million Black people, 10.2 million Latinx and 13.6 million Whites.** This is despite the fact that the U.S. spends more per capita on health care than any other country, at approximately $10,348 per person per year. In 2016, 43 percent of adults *with* health insurance struggled to pay their deductibles, nearly 30 percent had a hard time affording medical bills and 73 percent cut back on basic household needs and food to pay their medical bills. Medical debt is the number one cause of personal bankruptcy filings, with an estimated 40 percent of Americans taking on debt because of medical issues.

- **America has become a debtor nation.** Excluding the value of the family car, 19 percent of all U.S. households (60 million people), 30 percent of Black households, 27 percent of Latinx households, and 14 percent of White households have zero wealth or their debts exceeded the value of their assets.

The War Economy and Militarism

- **Since Vietnam, the United States has waged an ongoing war against diffuse enemies,**

siphoning massive resources away from social needs. The current annual military budget, at $668 billion, dwarfs the $190 billion allocated for education, jobs, housing, and other basic services and infrastructure. Out of every dollar in federal discretionary spending, 53 cents goes towards the military, with just 15 cents on anti-poverty programs.

> *"Our society is responsible for the creation of this soldier and that soldier's mind, more so I think than the individual person, because you are taught who to be…. And I know a number of members [of Veterans for Peace] who have done horrendous things and they're paying a price, a personal price, every day and every night."*
>
> Michael McPhearson, Gulf War veteran and director of Veterans for Peace

- **Washington's wars of the last 50 years have had little to do with protecting Americans, while the profit motive has increased significantly.** With private contractors now performing many traditional military roles, there have been almost 10 times as many military contractors per soldier in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars as there were during the Vietnam War, many of them making far more money than underpaid U.S. soldiers. Army privates in combat earned less than $30,000 in 2016. At the top end of the pay scale, the disparities are even more extreme. In 2016, the CEOs of the top five military contractors earned on average $19.2 million—more than 90 times the $214,000 earned by a U.S. military general with 20 years of experience, including housing allowances and extra combat pay and approximately 640 times the amount earned by Army privates in combat.

- **U.S. military interventions have caused staggering numbers of civilian deaths in poor countries.** According to the United Nations, almost one-third more civilians died in Afghanistan during the first nine months of 2017 than during that same period in 2009 when the counting began. Compared to the same period in 2016, there was a 52 percent increase of civilian deaths from airstrikes in 2017, with women and children comprising 68 percent of these deaths.

- **Perpetual war has also taken a toll on U.S. troops and personnel.** In 2012, suicide claimed more military deaths than military action. A follow-up study found that in 2014, the risk of suicide was 22 percent higher among veterans than among U.S. civilian adults. By September 2017, an average of 20 veterans were still dying by suicide each day. Among women in the military, sexual harassment is rampant. A 2012 Department of Veterans Affairs survey indicated that nearly half of female military personnel sent to Iraq or Afghanistan had reported being sexually harassed, and nearly 25 percent said they had been sexually assaulted.

> *"As horrifying as the status of women in Afghanistan may sound to those of us who live in the West, the biggest problems faced by Afghan women are not related to patriarchy. Their biggest problem is war."*
>
> Sonali Kolhatkar and Mariam Rawi, Afghan women activists

- **Militarism abroad has gone hand in hand with the militarization of U.S. borders and of poor communities across this country.** Local police are now equipped with war machinery such as the armored military vehicle deployed in Ferguson, Missouri, in response to protests over the police killing of a Black teenager, Michael Brown, in 2014. Young Black males have been

> *"Why invest in children, or healing and recovery, when there's money to be made in keeping the jails full?"*
>
> Aaron Scott, Chaplains on the Harbor

hardest hit by this escalation in force. They are nine times more likely to be killed by police officers than other Americans, while rates of police killings for Native American and Latinx men are also disproportionately high and poor youth of all races have suffered.

- **The perpetual war economy is also linked to the broader trend of criminalization of the poor over the past 50 years.** Policies that criminalize the very condition of being poor have continued to expand since the 2008 financial crisis. By the Department of Justice's own admission, ninety-five percent of the growth in the incarcerated population since 2000 is the result of an increase in the number of defendants unable to make bail. This is also the result of the fact that bail amounts themselves have increased over the years.

Ecological Devastation

- **The U.S. and global climate and ecological crises are multipliers of the other injustices documented in this report.** Fossil fuel, chemical, and other industries have been allowed to poison our air, water, and land, contributing to an estimated 9 million premature deaths (16 percent of all deaths) worldwide in 2015—three times more deaths than from AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria combined and 15 times more than from all wars and other forms of violence. The environmental death toll is expected to rise exponentially as a result of climate change. And the poor, particularly poor people of color, face the worst impacts.

> *"It was one thing to know that you didn't have water and you couldn't afford your water. It's a whole other thing to find out they shut off your entire community's water and none of you matter."*
>
> Valerie Jean, mother of five, grandmother of two, and member of Michigan Welfare Rights Organization

- **The tragic effects of Hurricane Maria on Puerto Rico in 2017 are a disturbing example of rising climate change threats, particularly for the poor.** Catastrophic events like hurricanes and flooding are partly attributable to climate change and are expected to become more frequent. When Maria hit Puerto Rico, where the poverty rate was already 43.5 percent, almost the entire island lost access to electricity. Two months later, more than half of the island's residents still lacked power and about nine percent lacked water. The delay was partly due to the poor state of the island's infrastructure, which had been allowed to deteriorate as the U.S. Congress pressured the island to prioritize debt payments to Wall Street. A New York Times analysis indicates as many as 1,025 people may have died as a result of the hurricane.

- **Across the United States, poor people face crises of water affordability, water pollution, and water scarcity in some areas exacerbated by climate change.** As a percentage of income, poor households spend seven times as much on water bills as wealthy households. The United Nations recommends that, in order to remain affordable, water rates do not exceed 3 percent of household income. Yet, there are 13.8 million low-income households that already spend more

> ***"Our addiction to fossil fuels in America is so predominant that we have spent an insane amount of military assets to protect it—the drilling, the supply, the trade, and pathways for fossil fuels. And here we are again in another brutal occupation that's not in Iraq or the Middle East, but in our own country, against our own citizens, people who have lived generations before White people arrived, fighting against these same mechanisms, the same corporations, the same government agencies, to try and stop this environmental colonialism. There is a direct relation to my fight in Iraq for oil and these people's fight here against oil."***
>
> Garett Rappenhagen, an Iraq War veteran who joined a delegation of veterans to Standing Rock, North Dakota in 2016

than 4.5 percent of their income on water, and some communities are facing water shut-off rates of 20 percent or more. Federal assistance to local water systems is now 74 percent below its peak in 1977, adjusted for inflation, even as pipes are aging and infrastructure investment needs are rising.

- **While poor urban populations deal with rising water bills, the rural poor often lack access to piped water and sewage systems, with striking racial disparities.** According to a 2016 study, an estimated 540,000 households (1.4 million to 1.7 million people) reported a lack of access to complete plumbing facilities. Of the 20 counties with the highest percentage of households lacking access to complete plumbing, all were rural and 13 had a majority Native American or Alaskan Native population.

- **Meanwhile, pipeline infrastructure to transport oil and gas has been expanding, even though it poses serious threats to the climate, water quality, and public health through leakage as well as catastrophic spills.** The proximity of pipelines to freshwater sources is particularly dangerous, since leaks of pollutants into water can spread large distances and affect drinking water sources for downstream communities. Between 1998 and 2017, there have been 5,712 significant oil and gas leaks or ruptures on U.S. pipelines. Between 1964 and 2015, there were 2,441 spills from offshore oil drilling operations in U.S. territorial waters, discharging almost 5.2 million barrels (218 million gallons) of oil. The largest of these was the 4.9 million barrel Deepwater Horizon "BP" oil spill off the coast of Louisiana in 2010.

- **The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) was responsible for emitting 72 percent of the U.S. government's total greenhouse gas emissions in 2016.** The DoD's overseas emissions, which are produced during the most destructive operations of the U.S. military, accounted for 56 percent of the U.S. Government's total greenhouse emissions; however, these overseas emissions are exempt from the U.S. Government's emissions reduction goals.

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As Rev. Dr. King said in 1967, "we must see now that the evils of racism, economic exploitation and militarism are all tied together…you can't really get rid of one without getting rid of the other." Today these evils, along with ecological devastation, have become more and more tightly bound together. They are part of a larger system that has concentrated economic and political power into fewer and fewer hands, driving a deepening and dangerous inequality that is impacting the majority of people in this country.

This means we must break through the notion that systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, militarism and ecological devastation only hurt a small segment of our society.

There are 140 million people struggling every day, and even more are saddled with debt or otherwise unable to make ends meet. Meanwhile, a small minority has amassed unheard-of wealth and power. In 2017, just three White men owned as much wealth as the bottom half of the U.S. population or 160 million people. And of the top 400 wealthiest people in the U.S., there are just two Black individuals and five with Latinx backgrounds. This predominantly White super wealthy class, however, does not represent the conditions facing the majority of White people in the country, even though they are used to prop up and maintain systemic racism and systems of white supremacy that keep people poor, in debt and in jail.

This report shows what has happened as the government increasingly caters to the interests of those few rich and powerful rather than being accountable to the poor and marginalized majority. In response, it is necessary to bring together all those who are impacted to build their own power.

This kind of power is emerging through the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. The Poor People's Campaign is a moral fusion coalition that is multi-racial, multi-gendered, intergenerational, inter-faith and constitutionally grounded and has been growing in more than 25 states around the country. It is seeking to build a unity across race, issue, gender, gender identity, sexual identity, age, faith and geography that can break through the politics that divide us.

The *Souls of Poor Folk* is providing an empirical basis to build and strengthen that unity. It also is only a beginning. It does not, and cannot, address the full range of issues under each theme. For this reason, we hope that it encourages more research, debate, and analysis, so that we may, together, identify the solutions we so desperately need.

"Throughout America's history — from abolition, to women's suffrage, to labor and civil rights — real social change has come when impacted people have joined hands with allies of good will to stand together against injustice. These movements did not simply stand against partisan foes. They stood for the deep moral center of our Constitutional and faith traditions. Those deep wells sustained poor and impacted people who knew in their bones both that power concedes nothing without a fight and that, in the end, love is the greatest power to sustain a fight for what is right."

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, Co-Chair of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival

INTRODUCTION

REV. DR. WILLIAM J. BARBER, II
PRESIDENT, REPAIRERS OF THE BREACH, AND CO-CHAIR OF THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN: A NATIONAL CALL FOR MORAL REVIVAL

REV. DR. LIZ THEOHARIS
CO-DIRECTOR, KAIROS CENTER FOR RELIGIONS, RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CO-CHAIR OF THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN: A NATIONAL CALL FOR MORAL REVIVAL

Callie Greer's daughter, Venus, died in her arms because she did not have health care. Venus did not die because it was her time to go or because God called her home, but because Alabama did not expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act.

Venus' death is not an isolated event. She was killed by the intersecting injustices of systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, the war economy and a distorted moral narrative. More than 250,000 people like Venus die in the United States from poverty and related issues every year, according to a 2009 study from the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University. The politicians who pass policies that result in death and hardship for many maintain control of our political system through racialized voter suppression. Rather than invest in programs that improve equity, our federal government spends fifty-three cents of every dollar on the war economy. Meanwhile, climate change and ecological devastation from oil spills to pollution are wreaking havoc on our lives and livelihoods, even as the name of God is used to justify these attacks on poor people and the earth.

Why the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival

50 years ago, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and many others called for a "revolution of values" in America. They invited people who had been divided to stand together against the "triplets of evil"—militarism, racism, and economic injustice—to insist that people need not die from poverty in the richest nation to ever exist. They sought to build a broad, fusion coalition that would audit America: Together, they would demand an accounting of promissory notes that had been returned marked "insufficient funds." Today that effort is still incomplete.

The Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival has developed out of years of organizing across the United States. In communities across this land, people impacted by systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, the war economy and our distorted moral narrative have said the same thing: "We want to be free! We need a Poor People's Campaign! We need a Moral Revival to make this country great for so many for whom it has not yet been."

To carry on this unfinished work, we are building a national movement from the states up. This is the kind of movement we need to unleash what Dr. King called "a new and unsettling force in our complacent national life." The fights for racial and economic equality are as inseparable today as they were half a century ago. We face a crisis in America: more than two in five Americans are poor or low-income, while millions of children and adults continue to live without access to health care, housing, clean water, or good jobs. At the same time, the issues of poverty and racism have been forced to the margins of the moral narrative and debate in our society. The distorted moral narrative that dominates the discussion has a limited focus on personal morality, overshadowing and supplanting a commitment to public morality rooted in a critique of systemic greed, racism, and injustice.

There was a time when our nation fought a War on Poverty; now, it seems, we are waging a war on the poor. Our social fabric is stretched thin by widening income inequality, while politicians

criminalize the poor, fan the flames of racism and xenophobia to divide the poor, and steal from the poor to give tax breaks to our richest neighbors and budget increases to a bloated military.

Why an audit

Because we believe in the importance of empirical analysis and real-life stories, The Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival commissioned this "audit" of the past 50 years. We must take stock of where our country has headed over the past 50 years and where we are today in order to suggest where we must go.

We are pleased to release The Souls of Poor Folk: Auditing America 50 Years After the Poor People's Campaign Challenged Racism, Poverty, Militarism and Our National Morality and with it, a clear framework for the moral agenda of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.

This report shines a light on the facts, figures and faces of those most impacted by systemic poverty, racism and militarism, over the past 50 years. It reminds us that we stand on the shoulders of freedom fighters who helped lead the 1968 Poor People's Campaign and that we also have far to go to overcome systemic racism, poverty, militarism and the war economy and ecological devastation. It confirms the fact that we need a Poor People's Campaign and a moral revival in the land – we need to shift the moral narrative in this country and proclaim that health care, voting rights, housing, living wage jobs, education, just immigration, and equal protection under the law are the real moral values we must hold up. It shows us that poor and marginalized people from all backgrounds, all places, and all religions are organizing and fighting for their lives, rights and deepest values. It insists that all humans have dignity and that life is sacred. In the stories and statistics shared in this Audit, we see the heart, souls, and leadership of poor people who are standing up to injustice and building a new world.

Why we must shift the moral narrative

The Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival aims to shift the distorted moral narrative, often promoted by religious extremists, from a focus on narrow issues like prayer in school, abortion, and gun rights to a focus on how our society treats the poor, those on the margins, the least of these, LGBTQ folks, workers, immigrants, the disabled and the sick; to how we institutionalize equality and equal representation under the law; and how we realize the desire for peace, love and harmony within and among nations.

In the 2016 Presidential Election, there were 25 debates in the primaries and the general election. Not one of these debates focused significantly on voter suppression, poverty, ecological devastation, or the war economy, all of which are central issues that impact most of us living in these United States most of the time. For too long the accepted moral narrative in America has blamed poor people for their poverty, pitted people against each other, separated systemic racism from poverty and ecology and the war economy, and spread the lie of scarcity: the idea that there is not enough to go around. And we have inherited a language that is too timid and puny for the crisis we face. The language of

left versus right and liberal versus conservative is too trivial to challenge the extremism that overwhelms our public discourse. We need a deeper, moral language to name this crisis: we need moral clarity. We must say, "Some things are not right versus left, but right versus wrong."

Why a moral fusion movement?

The Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival is rooted in a moral analysis based on our deepest religious and constitutional values that demand justice for all. Every major religious tradition places challenging oppression and criticizing systems of injustice at the center of its moral considerations. In addition, the moral principles of our Constitution are focused on establishing justice for the general welfare. We have lost this direction and a moral revival is necessary to change course and save the heart and soul of our democracy. This means lifting up and deepening the leadership of those most affected by systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, and ecological devastation and building understanding and unity across lines of division.

We know this is necessary because the rivers of resistance in our traditions echo their truths down through the centuries. And we know it is possible because we have seen it in North Carolina and in other states across the country. When extremist forces took over all three branches of government in North Carolina, people cried out in resistance. "Moral Mondays" protests drew tens of thousands to our state house in 2013 and inspired the largest state-government-focused civil disobedience campaign in U.S. history.

We dug deep into our state's history of fusion politics and committed to stand together. And we learned something about extremism: the same folks who were attacking public schools in our state were attacking health care. And the same folks against health care were against the LGBTQ community. And they were against labor. And they were attacking immigrants and Muslims and poor people. And to top it all off, the extremists were crying "voter fraud" as justification for the worst voter suppression measures since Jim Crow. All of these connections revealed something deeper about our movement: if they were cynical enough to get together on all of these issues, we had to be courageous enough to come out of our single-issue silos and fight together in the streets, in the legislature, in the courts and at the ballot box.

Through sustained moral fusion organizing, we were able to push back against extremism for four long years; to see political change in the defeat of an extremist Republican governor, the election of a progressive majority to our state Supreme Court, a federal court order for special elections to address racial gerrymandering in state legislature districts, and the overturning of a monster voter suppression law that targeted African-Americans "with almost surgical precision," according to a federal court. What began with an outcry in North Carolina became a sustained movement for political change through moral, fusion organizing, led by poor and impacted people.

And decades before, poor and homeless people in Pennsylvania, New York, Michigan, Texas, California, Massachusetts, Louisiana, Minnesota and many states across the country had united and organized across racial and geographic lines to win voting rights and housing rights and workers'

rights. They stand ready now to continue the fight and build the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.

Throughout America's history—from abolition, to women's suffrage, to labor and civil rights—real social change has come when impacted people have joined hands with allies of good will to stand together against injustice. These movements did not simply stand against partisan foes. They stood for the moral center of our Constitutional and faith traditions. Those deep wells sustained poor and impacted people who knew in their bones both that power concedes nothing without a fight and that, in the end, love is the greatest power to sustain a fight for what is right.

This moment requires us to push into the national consciousness a deep moral analysis as the foundation for an agenda to combat systemic poverty and racism, war mongering, economic injustice, voter suppression, and other attacks on the most vulnerable. We need a long term, sustained movement led by the people who are directly impacted by extremism. The Kairos Center and Repairers of the Breach and the dozens and hundreds of organizations we have worked with over the years have laid the foundation for this campaign over the past decade. Much like Septima Clark and the Highlander Center's Citizenship Schools in the 1950s and 60s, we have identified and connected grassroots leaders across the nation who are ready to join hands with new allies for sustained direct action that can fundamentally shift the narrative about who we are and who we want to be in this land.

This much is clear – our nation is in need of a movement, not just a moment. We are in need of transformation not just transaction. We need change not charity. And this nonviolent, multiracial, intergenerational, army of the poor is rising up to break every chain of injustice in the land.

During slavery, Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass and some Quakers and white evangelicals got together and formed a fusion movement that brought about abolition. When women didn't have the right to vote, Sojourner Truth and Elizabeth Cady Stanton got together, and they stood together until suffrage was won. Every major social movement in this nation's history has won, in the end, because a moral, fusion coalition came together and refused to stand down in the face of tyranny. It's our time now.

Why a launch, not just commemoration?

On December 4, 2017, grassroots leaders and clergy and activists launched the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. This was the 50th anniversary of the call for a Poor People's Campaign in 1967/68. But this Campaign is not a commemoration of what Dr. King and others did 50 years ago. We believe the only way you can honor the work that has come before is to reach back and pick up the baton and continue to build a movement. We stand on the shoulders of great leaders who have come before and fought for justice. But now this is our fight.

When thousands of people from at least 25 states across the country and Washington D.C. engage in a season of nonviolent moral fusion direct action, we will begin to break through the noise of racism,

poverty, militarism, ecological devastation, and Christian nationalism to demonstrate that another America is possible. Our work for the months and years to come is to build the political will and power to become the country we have never yet been.

This will necessarily be a multi-year undertaking. The 40 days will not be the culmination of work grassroots leaders are doing throughout the country, but a launch of a powerful, diverse, constitutionally grounded, moral movement in the United States.

Why State Capitols and Washington DC?

We will build up the power of people and state-based movements to serve as a vehicle for a powerful, long-term, moral movement in this country; and to transform the political, economic and moral structures of our society. We recognize the need to organize at the state and local level—many of the most regressive policies are being passed at the state level, and these policies will have long and lasting effect, past even executive orders. This movement must grow from the ground-up, not from the top-down: We are nationalizing state-based moral anti-poverty, anti-racist, pro-peace, pro-ecology movements with those most impacted in the lead.

Why five interlocking injustices?

Our experience in communities across this land has revealed how these five injustices intersect in America today. We have seen how systemic racism allows the powerful to deny the humanity of others; by denying the humanity of others, they are given permission to exploit or exclude people economically; they make use of their military powers to defend their ability to exploit and exclude people, and to control resources; this quest for control of resources leads to the potential destruction of our entire ecosystem and everything living in it. And we see how the current moral narrative of our nation both justifies this cycle and distracts us from it.

In Detroit, on the day that DACA was revoked by Donald Trump, a young Latino man named Adonis stood in front of a crowd as diverse as America and said, “They came after our Muslim neighbors, and we went to the airports to stand with them. They came after our sick family members, and we fought the repeal of the ACA. They’re coming after DACA now, and we’re going to stand. But we’re not just standing for ourselves. We’re standing for all of us.”

Adonis was speaking at a press conference and mass meeting of the Campaign. This mass meeting followed ones in Charlotte, North Carolina and Albuquerque, New Mexico; Detroit, Michigan; Topeka, Kansas and Louisville, Kentucky; Charlottesville, Virginia and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where Black, brown, Native, white, young, old, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, agnostic, straight, and queer people packed into houses of worship to proclaim that we need a Poor People’s Campaign and a revolution of values in our society.

This Campaign is bringing people together, breaking down walls that have been erected to divide us and building the power of people to right the wrongs of society and bring liberty and justice for all.

Why the souls of poor folk?

Indeed, there is a moral movement rising up in this country that is calling out these contradictions in our national morality. We are well aware that the only remedy for our moral crisis is a transformed national heart: a moral movement for families and communities rooted in constitutional and sacred values of compassion, empathy, and courageous dedication to the common good.

There is inalienable worth and intrinsic value to every person, regardless of wealth or public position. Policies that hurt the poor are a violation of that inalienable value. The "Souls of Poor Folk" is a declaration of the inherent value of every human being and a reminder that we are all worthy of the very necessities of life. It is also in direct contradiction to those who make moral claims about caring for the souls of people, but then pass policies that destroy their bodies and communities.

Please share the Souls of Poor Folk with anyone who has experienced this crisis first hand, or will listen to those who have. We invite everyone interested in being a part of this movement to join the *Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.*

Sign the pledge to get involved by going to www.poorpeoplescampaign.org.

A Fusion Movement in the South: The Moral Monday/Forward Together Movement

The Forward Together Moral Movement, better known as "Moral Monday," originated in North Carolina. Its weekly protests in 2013 gave it the nickname, but the movement rested on seven prior years of coalition-building around issues like poverty, public education, voting rights, racial justice, living wages, women's rights, environmental protection and healthcare. In 2006, Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II, then President of the North Carolina NAACP, and a corps of activists brought together sixteen progressive statewide organizations to launch the Historic Thousands on Jones Street coalition (HKONJ).

Those sixteen grew to more than two hundred civic and religious groups. "We recognized that many of the same political forces that are against, say, gender rights, are often also against education equality, environmental justice, and policies that help the poor," recalls Rev. Dr. Barber. "And so we said that we needed in North Carolina—and we said this when Democrats were in office—to revive a new form of Fusion politics if we were going to really address the South."

Fusion politics emerged in the South after the Civil War. "Between 1865 and the turn of the twentieth century," writes University of Chicago historian Jane Dailey, "every state south of the Mason-Dixon line experimented with political alliances that spanned the color line." In Virginia, Tennessee and North Carolina, interracial coalitions won control of state governments.

North Carolina's Fusion Movement came to power in 1868 and abolished slavery, provided universal male suffrage without regard to race or property ownership, and made public education a constitutional right. In the 1870s, white supremacists overthrew democratic governance. But in the 1890s, the Fusion Movement rose again. Black citizens who sought access to the ballot and safety from white terrorism joined with white farmers sick of exploitation by the banks, railroads, and rising industrialists. They championed free public education, modest regulation of monopoly capitalism, and "one man, one vote." They elected a Fusionist governor, swept the legislature, and took both U.S. Senate seats. Though hardly perfect, the Fusion coalition forged a bold experiment in interracial democracy. In 1898, white conservatives overthrew the government, stripped the vote from African Americans, and built a one-party Jim Crow state that lasted until the 1960s. Fusion politics nevertheless lit a beacon in whose light the civil rights movement marched and which the Moral Monday coalition lifted again.

In 2010, far-right Republicans took a majority in the legislature and drew new voting districts along racial lines. This maneuver allowed them to win a legislative super-majority in 2012. They quickly passed bills designed to tamp down voting by young people, Black, Latinx and poor people. The legislature also slashed unemployment benefits, cut taxes on the wealthy and corporations while raising them on the bottom 95 percent of citizens. They eliminated the Earned Income Tax Credit for 900,000 lower income families and blocked expansion of Medicaid, which pushed half a million poor people off their health insurance.

That spring of 2013, the Fusion coalition, avoiding partisan and ideological divisions and focusing on common moral and democratic values, stitched together a huge coalition of poor, wealthy and middle class; medical professionals and the uninsured; Christians, Jews, Muslims, and people from many other faith traditions alongside non-religious citizens who shared their belief in a social order grounded in love; LGBTQ groups and environmentalists; women's rights advocates and labor unions; teachers and students; Democrats and Republicans.

The movement built momentum in 2013 by turning out people every Monday at the state legislature to protest the outpouring of harsh and immoral laws. On April 29, about a hundred people showed up and the Capitol Police arrested seventeen demonstrators. Over the next eighteen weeks of "Moral Mondays," more than a thousand people went to jail in acts of civil disobedience. Tens of thousands flooded the General Assembly. Over the next four months, North Carolina's Republican governor fell from 65 percent approval ratings to 34 percent; he subsequently became the only GOP incumbent that could not ride Trump's coattails.

A Fusion Movement in the South: The Moral Monday/Forward Together Movement Cont.

In 2014, the Moral Monday Movement gathered an estimated 80,000 for the Moral March on February 14. In 2015, the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals struck down what they termed the state's "racial gerrymander." The next year, movement attorneys defeated the 2013 voter suppression bill.

In 2015, Rev. Barber and others from the Moral Monday Movement created Repairers of the Breach, dedicated to a moral agenda rooted in moral and constitutional values. On September 12, 2016, activists from Moral Monday and Repairers of the Breach, the Kairos Center for Religions, Rights and Social Justice, labor organizers from Fight for $15, faith leaders like Sister Simone Campbell and Nuns on the Bus, and religious and political groups across the nation organized "A Moral Day of Action" with simultaneous protests at thirty state capitols. They delivered the "Higher Ground Moral Declaration" to their respective state elected officials. In 2016, Repairers of the Breach made a commitment to revive the Poor People's Campaign with the Kairos Center and hundreds of churches and grassroots organizations across the country.

A Time of Crisis and Opportunity: The Kairos Center and Poverty Initiative

Kairos: The Center for Religions, Rights and Social Justice was launched in 2013 at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. The word "Kairos" describes a break in time: a moment when opportunities arise to dramatically change society and move it in a new direction. A kairos moment is often a time of crisis, but also transformation. True to its name, the Kairos Center is committed to continuing a long history of social movements, grassroots organizing and religious and political education to strengthen transformative movements for social change.

The cornerstone program of the Kairos Center is the Poverty Initiative, which, over the course of a decade, has established a wide and deep network of more than 1000 community and religious leaders, representing more than 350 organizations and congregations spanning 30 states and 17 countries. This multiracial and diverse network is on the frontlines of the struggles for water, housing, welfare, health care, education, farmworkers and food justice, living wages, criminal justice reform, immigrant rights, an end to war and more. Many of the leaders in the Kairos Center's network have roots in much earlier struggles for justice, including: the National Union of the Homeless, the National Welfare Rights Organization, the Anti-war and Peace movements, and the Civil Rights and Black Freedom struggles, among others.

Through strategic dialogues, organizing tours, grassroots exchanges, public events and truth commissions, the Kairos Center has been able to expand and deepen this network over the past five years. This includes connecting with the Moral Mondays/Forward Together leadership and the Repairers of the Breach. In 2016, the Kairos Center's co-director, Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis joined a 30-state "Moral Revival" tour with Rev. Dr. Barber, Rev. Dr. Traci Blackmon, Sister Simone Campbell and Rev. Dr. James Forbes. This tour brought together clergy and community leaders, Fight for $15 Fast Food workers, and other people of good conscience to raise up fundamental moral values of love, dignity, equality, and democracy to the most pressing issues of our time.

In April 2017, the Kairos Center and Repairers of the Breach organized a gathering at the historic Highlander Center with more than 40 grassroots, community and religious leaders and cultural artists to begin planning towards the 2017-2018 Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.

DESPITE THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACTS OF 1957, 1960, AND 1964 AND THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965, JUSTICE IS NOT A REALITY FOR THE BLACK, MEXICAN-AMERICAN, INDIAN, AND PUERTO RICAN POOR. DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT, HOUSING, AND EDUCATION NOT ONLY PERSISTS, BUT IN MANY AREAS IS RAPIDLY INCREASING.

— COMMITTEE OF 100, STATEMENTS OF DEMANDS OF THE RIGHTS OF THE POOR, 1968

SYSTEMIC RACISM

IF YOU BELIEVE IN HEALTH CARE, IF YOU BELIEVE IN LIVING WAGES, IF YOU BELIEVE IN ADDRESSING POVERTY, YOU BETTER MAKE SURE YOU UNDERSTAND VOTER SUPPRESSION HITS BLACK FOLK FIRST, BUT IT UNDERMINES ALL PEOPLE. IT HURTS EVERY ONE OF US."

– REV. DR. WILLIAM J. BARBER, II, 2017

The United States was built upon the structural denial of basic rights to people of color, establishing a system of white supremacy. This system began with the genocide of indigenous people and slavery. It concentrated economic and political power in the hands of a small number of people through the politics of oppression and division. While the laws, institutions, and outcomes associated with systemic racism have changed over the course of history, the inequality produced by it still operates today. Recognizing and engaging in collective resistance against this political order is essential for building power among the poor in America.

Circumstances have also changed since the mid-20th century. By the launch of the Poor People's Campaign in 1968, the Civil Rights Movement had achieved several milestones for racial equality. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 signaled major progress in ending overt racism in public policy. Racist public discourse had also become less socially acceptable.

Yet the rule of white supremacy continued to operate as a form of civic hierarchy, attaching political, economic, and social benefits to racial identity. Political tactics aimed at stirring up White resentment and fear of people of color persisted in the form of code words like "welfare queen" and racial stereotypes like the notorious "Willie Horton" ads of the 1988 presidential campaign. These tactics were used across the political spectrum and further embedded racial inequality in U.S. institutions, cementing racial gaps in a wide range of areas.

After 2016, emboldened White nationalists took to the streets brandishing Nazi symbols and glorifying the pro-slavery Confederacy, signifying a notable rise in the number of U.S.-based hate groups. This resurgence of racist rhetoric and organizing is rooted in the systemic retrenchment of racial disparities across a number of areas in American society over the past 50 years. This inequality operates beyond the individuals and communities most directly impacted to undermine the basic tenets of our democracy and human rights.

This section identifies some of the key indicators of systemic racism in trends and policies relating to voter suppression, immigration, education, health, and criminal justice.

Section I: Voter Suppression

More than 50 years after the Voting Rights Act, people of color still experience a broad range of attacks on their voting rights, including racialized redistricting, voter ID laws, proof of citizenship, voter restriction hurdles, reduction of days for early and absentee voting, felony disenfranchisement, purging of voter rolls, preemption laws, and emergency financial manager appointments. While racialized voter suppression tactics have continually operated in the post-civil rights era, their dramatic rise in the past decade has curtailed the democratic freedoms of millions in the U.S.

Despite an overwhelming lack of evidence, policymakers have successfully pushed the myth of widespread voter fraud into political discourse. In the 21st century, voter suppression laws have become an increasingly popular strategy for restricting voting blocs that feature large numbers of voters of color and the poor, creating barriers to voting along race and class lines.

According to the Electoral Integrity Project, partisan redistricting and gerrymandering were the greatest threat to fair elections in the United States in 2016. In May 2017, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on the racially discriminatory intent of voter suppression laws, refusing to revive a North Carolina election law that the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals had found to "target African Americans with almost surgical precision." The court found that the following parts of the North Carolina law disproportionately affected Black people: shortening early voting from 17 days to 10 days; voter ID requirements; elimination of same-day registration and preregistration of some teenagers; and a ban on counting votes cast in the wrong precinct. On January 9, 2018, a federal court ordered North Carolina to redraw its districts on the grounds that they demonstrated partisan bias.

Recent court battles over district lines in Native American communities further highlight the process of racialized voter suppression strategies. At least 17 states in 2016 have seen cases brought to litigation or tribal diplomacy involving voter suppression that has targeted Native American and/or Alaskan Native voters. In some instances, Native American voters have had to travel an average of two hours to submit a ballot without access to reliable public transportation.

In total, the Brennan Center for Justice has reported that 23 states adopted various forms of voter suppression laws since 2010, including 13 with more restrictive voter ID laws (6 with strict photo ID requirements), 11 with laws making it harder to register, 6 with reduced early voting days and hours, and 3 that made it harder to restore voting rights for people with past criminal convictions. Between 2001 and 2012, 910 restrictive voter ID bills were introduced in state legislatures. Then, in the 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* case, the Supreme Court struck down key provisions of the Voting Rights Act that had required federal preclearance for certain jurisdictions.

Miss Rosanell Eaton: A Lifelong Fight for the Right to Vote

In 1942, Miss Rosanell Eaton registered to vote at the age of 18 in North Carolina. She approached the Franklin County Courthouse on a mule and was asked by a panel of three White men to stand up straight and repeat the Preamble of the Constitution. After she passed the literacy test, she became one of the few Black people to be registered to vote in the era of Jim Crow. A lifelong voting rights activist, she registered more than 4,000 people to vote in North Carolina. And then in 2013, after 70 years of voting and because her name on her voter registration card did not match her driver's license, she lost her ability to vote. She pressed on, making nearly a dozen trips to various state agencies and became one of the key plaintiffs in the case against the North Carolina voting rights restrictions. As she said at a rally in 2015, "Here I am at 92 years old doing the same battling. I have registered over 4,000 citizens in the state and am at it again, alongside Republicans' efforts to eliminate and cut early voting and to outlaw Sunday's voting, alongside the effort to keep college students from voting by inflicting a heavy financial penalty on their parents if they attempt to vote away from home….At the age of 92, I am fed up and fired up!"

All of this is consistent with a 2015 national study which found that states with a high turnout of voters of color in the previous presidential election were on average expected to see more than three additional restrictive proposals every two years. Such laws can have significant effects on voter turnout. A University of California San Diego study that looked at the most common voter

suppression tactic—voter ID laws—found that they doubled the turnout gap between Whites and Latinx people in general elections, and nearly doubled the White-Black turnout gap in primary elections.

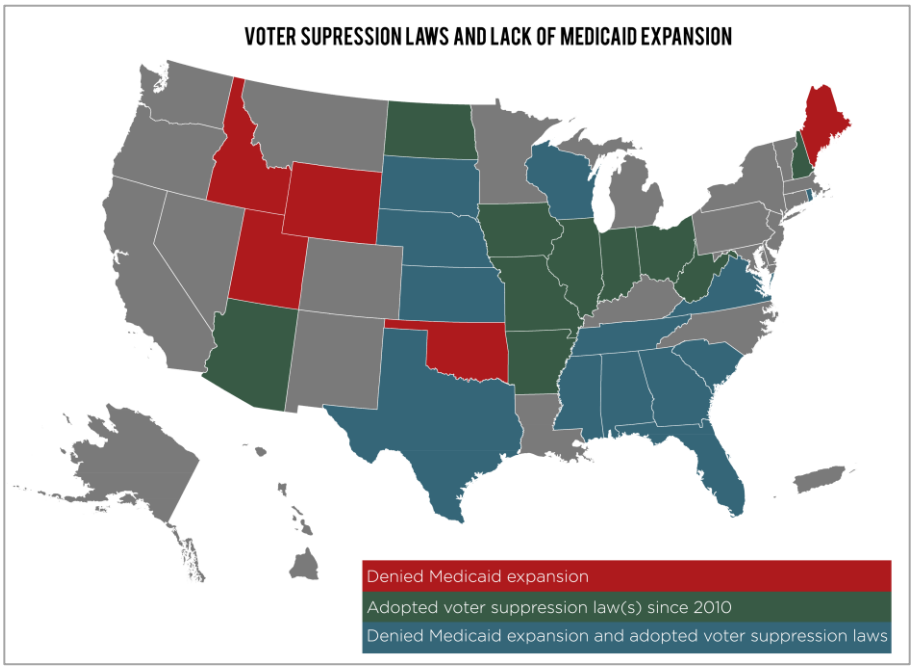
By 2016, 14 states had new voting restrictions in place for the first time in a presidential election: Alabama, Arizona, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin. These steps disproportionately target low-income residents and neighborhoods of color. When including felony voter disenfranchisement, eight out of the ten poorest states have enacted voter suppression laws, or only recently saw such laws overturned in federal court.

Since 1968, the number of disenfranchised voters has tripled, from 2 million to 6.1 million Americans in 2016, including one in thirteen Black adults. In four states (Florida, Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee), more than one in five Black adults cannot vote. Nationally, 13 percent of all Black men have been denied the right to vote. As the Center for American Progress reports, the political barriers that previously incarcerated Black men and women face go hand in hand with barriers to employment, housing, public assistance and education.

The map in Figure 1.1 below reveals how voter suppression at the state level is often accompanied by economic suppression. Thirteen states that passed voter suppression laws also opted not to accept expanded Medicaid benefits offered under the Affordable Care Act, denying much-needed support to more than a million people of color.

Caitlin Swain, a civil rights attorney who challenged the North Carolina voter suppression laws, has noted that, "The same states that have the most voter suppression efforts also host the greatest denial of healthcare, denial of living wages, the highest rates of incarceration and disproportionate imprisonment of people of color, and the highest rates of child poverty. Affordable housing, disability benefits, medical care, income and living wages, protections against environmental racism, and the divestment of long-term wealth in our communities foundationally depend on the right to a true political voice."

Figure 1.1



Sources: Repairers of the Breach, based on data from the Brennan Center for Justice and the Kaiser Family Foundation.

The imposition of "emergency financial managers" on cities in dire fiscal straits also makes clear this relationship between voter suppression on the one hand and policies with heightened impact on the poor on the other. In Michigan, under personal appointment by the governor, emergency managers have sweeping powers, including the authority to dismiss elected officials, scrap labor contracts, sell off public assets, and impose new taxes, yet they are not accountable to voters.

According to Michigan Welfare Rights Organization's Bill Wylie-Kellerman, who faced trial for protesting water shut-offs as one of the Homrich 9, "Every Black city in the state of Michigan has been under non-elected governments where an emergency manager appointed by the Governor has all the powers of the government in one person: [they] can rewrite laws, repeal laws, sell assets, rewrite the city charter, privatize departments, break union contracts... Three-quarters of the Black elected officials in Michigan have been replaced by emergency managers." This means that more than half (51 percent) of the state's Black residents have fallen under the authority of a non-elected official, alongside 16.6 percent of Latinx during 2008–2013, compared to 2.4 percent of the state's White population. Flint was under emergency management when the city decided to switch its water source from the Detroit water system to the Flint River, a move that poisoned the city's population of almost 99,000 people, approximately 54 percent Black and 40 percent White.

Another two dozen state governments have suppressed democratic participation through preemption laws that remove the power of local elected officials. These laws can transfer power from officials representing Black and Brown voters to a majority White state electorate, to the detriment of broader numbers of the poor. Local ordinances such as nondiscrimination laws, guaranteed paid sick days, and nutritional restrictions have been struck down across the country.

Currently, 25 states have laws that preempt cities from passing their own minimum wage laws, many in response to successful minimum wage campaigns.

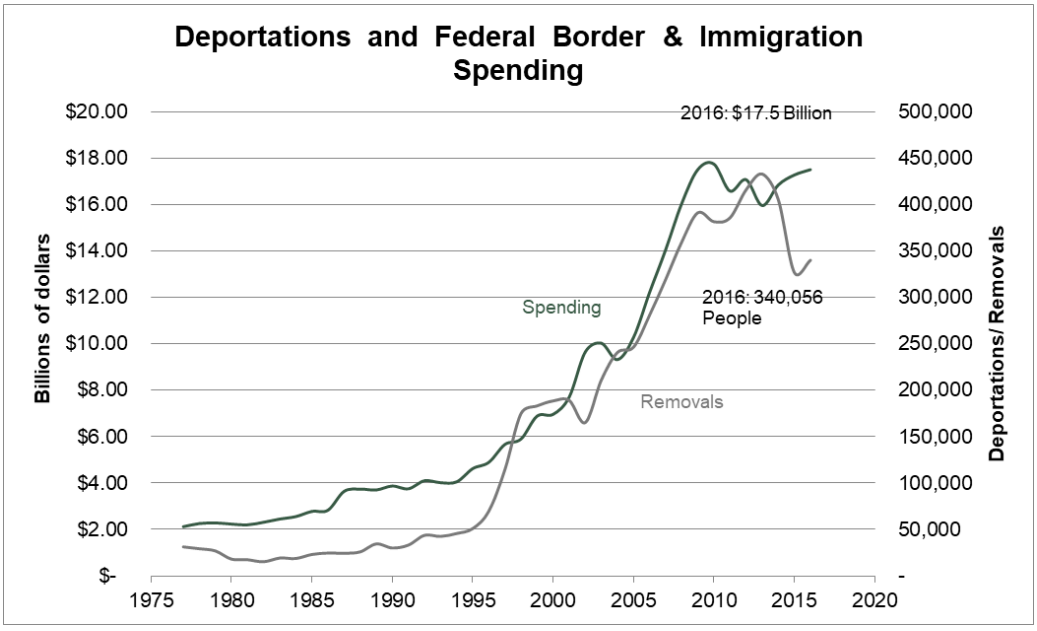
Section II: Immigration

The current U.S. administration has escalated racist, anti-immigrant policies by stripping protections for immigrants brought into this country as children, repeatedly attempting to ban immigration from Muslim countries, proposing a massive southern border wall, stepping up deportation raids in workplaces and other spaces frequented by Latinx people, and reducing admissions for individuals who had previously received refugee status.

And yet the systemic racism that permeates our immigration policies is not new. Since 1968, there has been a steady increase in federal spending aimed at keeping immigrants out of the country, the bulk of it focused on the U.S.-Mexico border. This has coincided with a dramatic increase in the numbers of deportations since 1996, totaling about six million.

As Figure 1.2 shows, in 1976, the federal government spent $2 billion on border control and immigration enforcement (in today's dollars) and deported or removed 31,000 people. By 2016, such spending had risen to almost nine times that much, with about 11 times as many deportations. In 2016, 340,000 immigrants were removed or deported. Meanwhile, the number of border patrol agents grew to 19,437 by 2017, nearly five times as many as in 1992.

Figure 1.2



Sources: Office of Management and Budget; U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Deportations are the compulsory movement of immigrants out of the United States based on an order of removal.

Immigration detentions in prisons and jails have also risen dramatically: from 1993 to 2013, immigration detentions increased five-fold from about 85,000 to about 441,000 per year. These detention centers have increasingly become sites of sexual and physical abuse: 11,379 complaints alleging sexual and/or physical abuse were filed between 2010 and 2016 with 1,016 instances of sexual abuse. More complaints were submitted against Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) than any other Department of Homeland Security agency. LGBT immigrants are 15 times more likely than other detainees to experience sexual assault in confinement, and face disproportionately high rates of discretionary detainment by ICE officials that override protocol or policy recommendation. In El Paso, Texas, this discretion is also taking form in a new practice of separating children from their family members and holding them in "child care centers," even though children cannot legally be kept in detention.

Migrant deaths have increased under border enhancement laws, as individuals are purposefully directed towards more dangerous migration corridors. And as the number of states implementing immigration laws has increased in the past decade, research has found that incidences of physical and verbal abuse by enforcement officers have risen as well.

Beyond Immigrant Rights: The Border Network for Human Rights

The Border Network for Human Rights (BNHR) has been organizing in *colonias* along the U.S.-Mexico border for nearly twenty years. With a membership of more than 4,000 people, including over 700 families in West Texas and New Mexico, BNHR has established deep relationships across multiple border communities, including with local border enforcement. Out of this long engagement, families and loved ones are now able to meet with each other for a few short minutes on the U.S.-Mexico border in the Rio Grande river. This recognition of their humanity is one step towards BNHR's broader vision of human rights. As Executive Director Fernando Garcia explains, "We are not only an immigrant rights organization, we are a human rights organization that is fighting to change society for everybody."

"Throughout the 20th and 21st century, but specifically since the 1970s, public discourse has framed the U.S.-Mexico border as a place of lawlessness, in comparison to an apparently orderly U.S. interior," Garcia explains. "When the border is portrayed as the opposite of lawful, it becomes especially criminal. This has justified the building of border fences, border walls, the posting of thousands of agents, and the increased number of weapons and arms at the U.S.-Mexico border….[but] over time, we have seen an expanded militarization into the United States. We saw the militarization of police departments in the interior. We saw that they learned out of the border experience how to militarize a police department and give them the tools to repress and persecute people in the interior of the United States…We know that we need to take up the decriminalization of immigrants and poor communities. We need to demilitarize our communities. And we need a democratic process that is accountable to our communities. None of these are unique to border communities. It is what we are all fighting for."

Meanwhile, child poverty rates among immigrants doubled from 1970 to 2000, leaving 21.6 percent of immigrant children impoverished. Researchers have found that the impact of immigration enforcement measures affects low-income children, leading to greater difficulty in affording basic expenses, paying rent, or paying for utilities. Children of immigrants fare worse in terms of health than children in households headed by U.S. citizens and children with at least one unauthorized

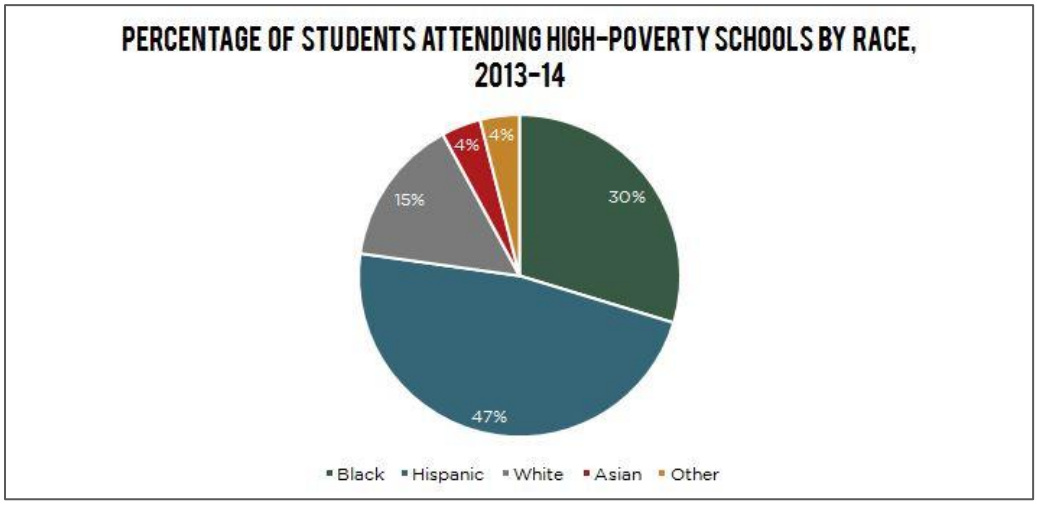
parent suffer from increased rates of psychological distress, while having less access to public health programs.

Foreign-born immigrant workers experience disproportionately high rates of dangerous working conditions, wage violations, and sexual harassment. These figures are often worse for women. A 2010 survey of 150 farmworker women in California—an industry predominantly employing foreign-born immigrant workers—found that 80 percent had experienced some form of sexual harassment, over twice the national rate. Exploitative working conditions are largely caused by the structure of low-wage industries that immigrant workers are concentrated in, such as the prevalence of contractors, exemptions to minimum wage laws, unequal status for migrant workers, underfunded government enforcement, and low union membership. These industry characteristics have historically been enforced through racist American labor and industry legislation, with negative impacts for all low-wage workers in the U.S.

Section III: Education

Educational divides are another factor in race-based gaps and crucial to understanding the connection between systemic racism and poverty. From 2000 to 2014, the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that the percentage of K-12 public schools where 75 to 100 percent of the students were Black or Hispanic and eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (a commonly used indicator of poverty) increased from 9 to 16 percent. Of all students attending high-poverty schools in 2013, the overwhelming majority were students of color. Compounding the challenges facing these schools, the analysis found that Latinx students tend to be "triple segregated"—not only by race and class, but also by language access. These schools disproportionately held students back in 9th grade and offered disproportionately fewer college preparatory, science, and math courses.

Figure 1.3

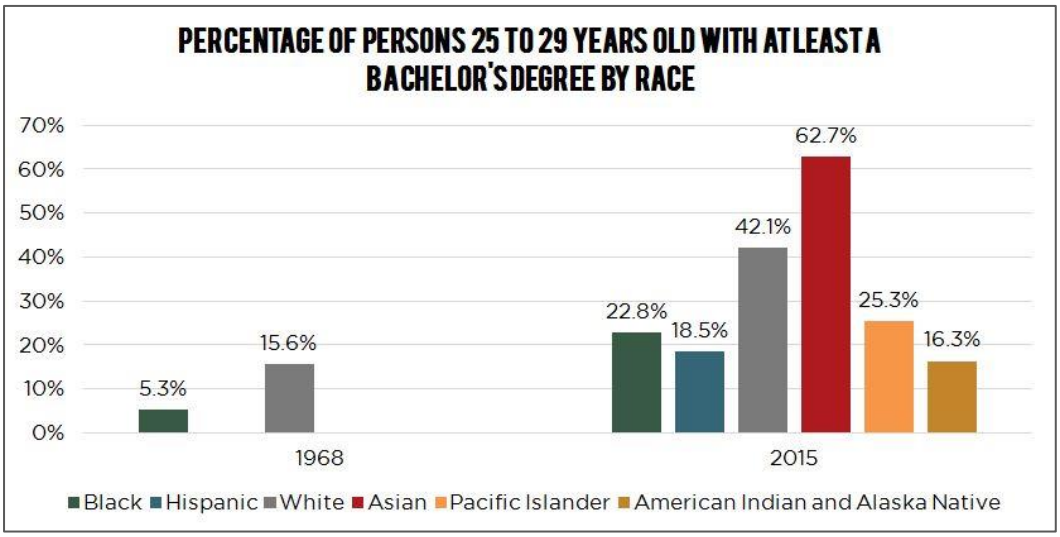


Source: U.S. Government Accountability Office.

Since the original Poor People's Campaign, an educational achievement gap has persisted between White and Black students, across age categories. While this gap has narrowed over time, it still exists. A similar gap exists between White students and Latinx students.

With the introduction of "zero-tolerance policies" in schools, out of school suspensions have risen by 40 percent and these disproportionately target Black and other disempowered youth. Black girls are six times more likely than White girls to receive suspensions. Black boys are three times more likely to receive suspensions than White boys. Black youth are 500 percent more likely and Latinx youth are 65 percent more likely to be detained or committed than their White counterparts, despite the recent rise of alternatives to juvenile detention.

Figure 1.4



Source: National Center for Education Statistics. Data for Whites in 2015 is for non-Hispanic Whites only. Data for Hispanics, Asians, Pacific Islanders, American Indian and Alaska Natives not available for 1968.

For higher education, figure 1.4 shows that in 1968, White people in the 25-29 year age group were nearly three times as likely as Black people to have completed four or more years of college. By 2015, the ratio had narrowed, but White people were still almost twice as likely as Black people and Pacific Islanders and almost three times as likely as Latinx and Native Americans to have this level of education.

One major barrier to higher education for many poor people of color is the rising cost. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the price tag for attending a four-year college in 2015 (including tuition, room and board, and fees) was $25,409—2.5 times as much as in 1968, adjusted for inflation. These costs have outpaced real median household income, requiring students and their families to spend a higher proportion of their budgets towards the rising costs of education. According to a 2018 study from the Levy Institute, in 1990, average tuition and fees totaled 6.3 percent of median household income and 17.6 percent when including room and board. By 2014,

average tuition and fees had more than doubled, totaling 15.9 percent of median household income; with room and board, costs rose to 34.7 percent.

While U.S. colleges and universities have historically reproduced inequality in various forms, the rapid growth of high-cost, high-risk, for-profit colleges is particularly problematic. Black people, women, and especially low-income women of color are disproportionately enrolled in for-profit institutions: among for-profit college students, 64 percent are women, 52 percent are people of color, 50 percent have dependent children, 51 percent work full-time while enrolled, and 59 percent are unlikely to receive tuition support from their family. At the same time, less expensive and higher quality institutions are struggling after decades of declining public investment, most notably the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs.)

To meet these costs, there has been a steep rise in student debt, which now affects about 44 million Americans. As of March 2017, aggregate student loan debt was $1.34 trillion in the United States. As the January 2018 Levy Institute report concludes, "Even below-average student loan balances can be problematic for low-income borrowers choosing between making on-time payments and other financial demands."

Black families, on average, carry more loan debt than White families: 81 percent of Black people attending public universities and 86 percent attending private universities take on debt, compared to 63 percent and 72 percent for White people. Among Latinx populations, 87 percent attending private universities also take on debt.

Figure 1.5

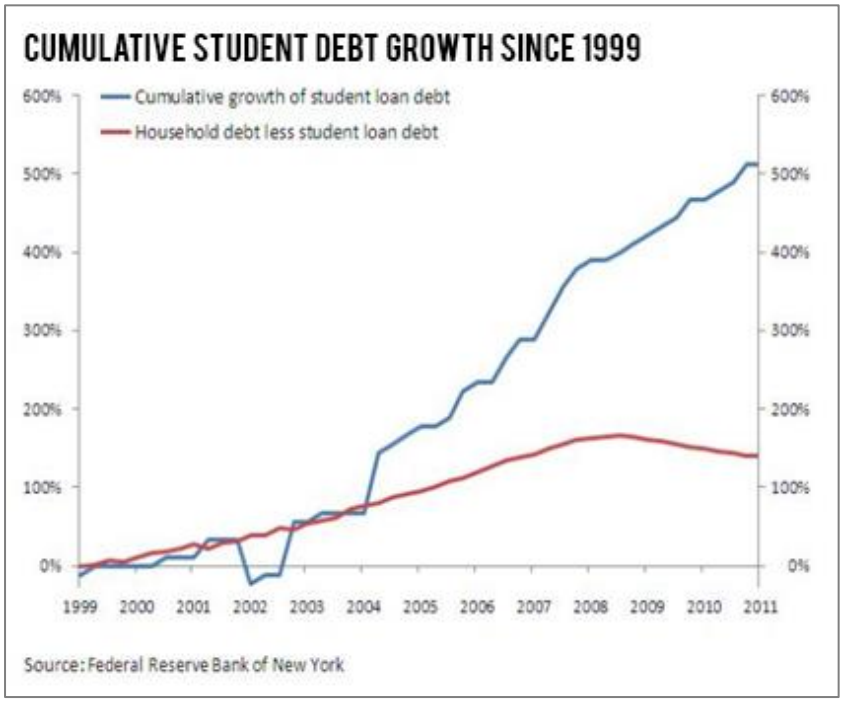
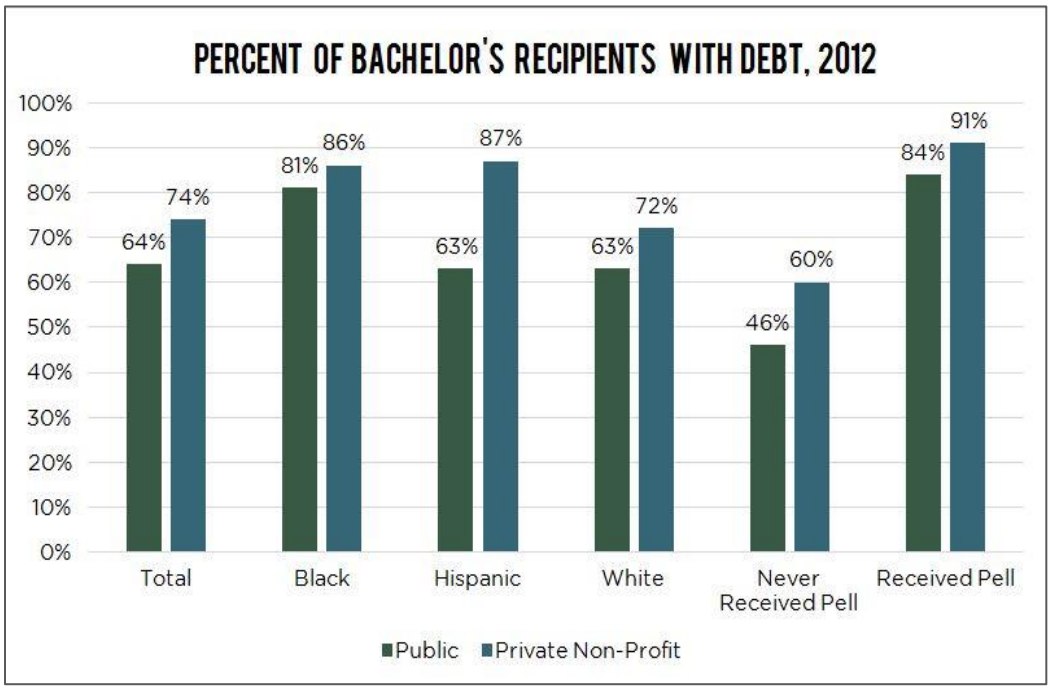


Figure 1.6



Source: Demos, The Debt Divide

Many of these costs and debt burdens are carried by women, especially women of color, who are also the most likely students to be raising children while pursuing a post-secondary degree. Nearly half - 47 percent - of Black women in college have dependent children, followed by approximately two in five Native American or Alaska Native women (41 percent) and Hawaiian or Pacific Islander women (39 percent). Among single students with children, 88 percent are poor or low-income, and the average debt of student mothers one year after graduation is $3,800 higher than women without children and almost $5,000 higher than men without children.

Section IV: Housing Discrimination and Segregation

With the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the era of legalized housing discrimination was brought to an end. The law made it illegal to avoid renting or selling to people because of their race, among other categories. Despite the ban on housing discrimination, racism in the housing market continued to deliver unfair outcomes to people of color, especially poor people of color. This is in part due to the rising costs of housing. Over the past 30 years, rents have gone up faster than income in nearly every urban area in the country, while the median cost of a home has ballooned from $23,500 in 1968 to $323,000 in 2018. In this context, households and individuals who also face discriminatory hiring, wage disparities and debt burdens are at a severe disadvantage.

Even among those households that can afford such housing costs, discrimination in the market continues to reduce access to affordable housing. An audit by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 1977 found that Black people had a 27 percent chance of being discriminated against on a visit to see a rental apartment and 15 percent on a visit to see a home for sale. Through subsequent audits in 1989, 2000, and 2012 the Department found that discrimination had greatly decreased against Black people since the 1970s, but still persisted. For example, Black homebuyers who contacted agents about homes were able to see about 18 percent fewer homes in 2012 than equally qualified White people.

After 1968, "White flight" from cities to the suburbs, combined with increasing rates of economic segregation within inner cities, resulted in continued segregation. While segregation has marginally eased in recent years, the process of gentrification has taken hold. Displacement has driven many of the same poor Black and Brown minority communities that settled in the urban ghettos out of their neighborhoods. A range of studies have found that "in-movers to gentrifying neighborhoods are wealthier, Whiter and of higher educational attainment and out-movers are more likely to be renters, poorer, and people of color." Those that remain in gentrifying areas, typically located in urban cities that may have once boasted numerous housing options for low- and moderate-income households, are confronted with increasing housing costs geared toward higher-income buyers and renters. Housing prices can climb even higher if the demand for housing exceeds the available supply. Either way, those with incomes less able to accommodate growing housing costs are finding it increasingly difficult to secure housing.

In some rural communities in the South, basic housing infrastructure has not been updated in years, sometimes decades. As Catherine Flowers, an Air Force veteran and native of Lowndes County, Alabama, describes: "It's shocking to see that there hasn't been a big investment in terms of housing since the 1960s and 1970s, maybe part of the early 1980s. Then it was through programs like the Farmers Home Administration, a rural housing program that gave people resources to develop housing. Instead what I've found is that in 2000, the USDA was sending money back to Washington. It wasn't spending its resources in those communities for infrastructure."

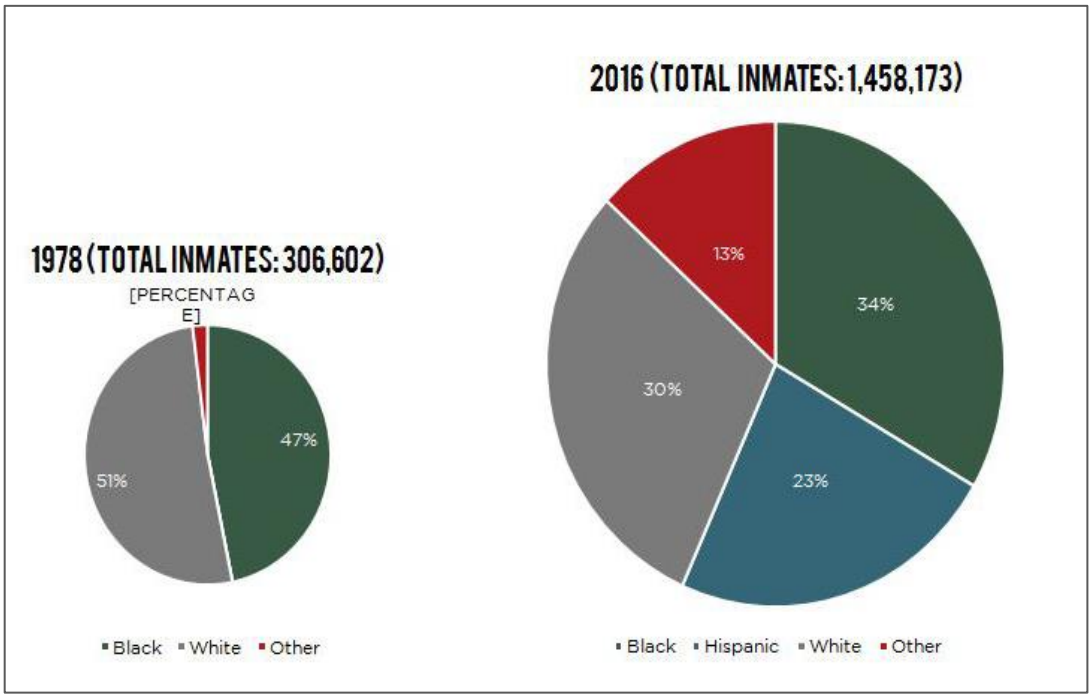
Section V: Criminal Justice System

Over the past 50 years, the criminal justice system has become a critical institutional anchor of systemic racism. "Tough on crime" politics has led to skyrocketing annual federal discretionary spending on prisons—$7.5 billion in 2017, a tenfold increase over 1976—and increased policing of poor communities to fill them. The 1970s marked the beginning of an increase in longer prison terms and a reduction in early releases. Since 1968, the number of sentenced inmates in U.S. state and federal prison of all races grew from 187,914 in 1968 to 1,458,000 in 2016. This is despite the fact that, in recent years, campaigns against mass incarceration have effectively reduced the numbers of inmates from big cities. Today, the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, almost 5 times the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average.

In 1978 (the first year for which racial demographics are available) people of color made up less than half of the prison population. By 2016, they comprised 66 percent, a fivefold increase in total numbers. According to the Urban Institute, increasingly long sentences, mandatory minimums, and three-strikes policies have all had a disproportionate impact on people of color. Black men born in 2001 are almost six times more likely to be incarcerated in their lifetimes as White men born in the same year, while Native American women are currently admitted to prison at six times the rate of White women.

Figure 1.7

U.S. federal and state prison population by race



Source: U.S. Department of Justice. The 2016 data were collected for White (non-Hispanic), Black (non-Hispanic), and Hispanic. "Other" includes American Indians and Alaska Natives; Asians, Native Hawaiians, and Other Pacific Islanders; and persons of two or more races. The 1978 data were collected for: White, Black, and "other," which included American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Asians, and Pacific Islanders). Hispanic ethnicity of inmates was not determined in 1978, a year in which people of Spanish descent made up 5 percent of the total population.

Women held in local jails are the fastest-growing segment of incarcerated people in the United States, and the majority of them are Black or Latinx, according to a 2017 study by the MacArthur Foundation and the Vera Institute of Justice. From 1970 to 2014, the total female jail population increased fourteen-fold from under 8,000 to nearly 110,000. More than 80 percent of these women were imprisoned for non-violent offenses.

Rural and Urban Incarceration

Since 1970 there has been a shift in rural and urban incarceration trends. As reported by the Vera Institute in 2017, counties with fewer than 250,000 people drove jail growth between 1970 and 2013. This may be due to a national increase in pretrial detention that, especially in the past decade, has been concentrated in rural counties: while national pretrial detention rates have increased by 68 percent, the rate for rural counties increased by 436 percent during this same period.

These trends may reflect the limited resources in rural counties, contributing to the financial incentives to grow jails. According to the Vera Institute, "Demands from other systems — overcrowded federal and state prison systems, neighboring county jails, and the federal immigration detention system — have propelled an ever-expanding need for jail beds, providing counties with additional income streams through per-diem payments for each person they board in from other systems. Such payments...can add up to substantial revenue for cash-strapped rural jurisdictions, because many out-of-county boarders often stay for long periods of time. This is especially true for people who are serving multi-year state sentences, or undocumented immigrants who are fighting deportation orders and awaiting formal adjudication in an overworked and under-resourced immigration court system."

Racial sentencing disparities worsen the impact of the criminal justice system on poor communities of color. According to the NAACP, for example, while Black and White people use drugs at similar rates, the imprisonment rate of Black people for drug charges is almost six times that of White people. And even though Black people represent just 12.5 percent of illicit drug users, they make up nearly 30 percent of those arrested for drug offenses. Similarly, Black men receive sentences 19 percent longer than White men for the same crimes, according to the United States Sentencing Commission, and are disproportionately targeted for capital punishment.

Returning citizens face major difficulties upon their release from prison, especially as some states ban those with felony convictions from access to social assistance, voting rights, and work licenses. Barriers to reintegration contribute to social and economic marginalization of people who were formerly incarcerated, their families, and their communities. The requirement to state felony convictions on job applications also present a barrier to reintegration into the economy. According to Pew, the typical former inmate earns $179,000 less by age 48 than they would have earned if they had never been incarcerated. Incarceration depresses the wages of Black men 9 percent, of Latinx men 6 percent, and of White men 2 percent.

Durell Gilmore, an organizer with Sunflower Community Action in Kansas, testified to these conditions:

"I am from Kansas, where they spend $7 out of every $10 on juvenile services resources to incarcerate young people, with clear racial bias in sentencing and detainment. When I was 20 years old, I was handed down a heavy sentence for my first criminal offense, with the threat of spending 7 years in prison. I pleaded out to a severe felony charge and three years on probation. This has haunted me. It has made it difficult to work and live and be the kind of father I desperately want to be to my children.

My probation officer told me that instead of going to college full time, it was a condition of my probation to work 40 hours a week. So now I work more than one job and dropped out of college."

Durell's cousin, Reggie, is serving out a 40-year sentence. His White male cohorts were given sentences of five years and are awaiting release after serving two years of that sentence. After being beaten, shot in the back and left to bleed out on the ground, Reggie was kicked repeatedly by Wichita police officers until his lungs collapsed. He spent two years in solitary confinement. Durell describes him as "a mere shadow of his former self. There is no justice in this criminal system."

From Deindustrialization to Mass Incarceration in Los Angeles

Luis Rodriguez has been educating and working in South Central and East Los Angeles with poor and incarcerated youth for the past 50 years. He grew up amid the Watts Uprising in 1965 and joined his first gang at the age of 11. He used his position as the Poet Laureate of L.A. to raise awareness around incarceration, poverty, and racism. He is also the co-founder of the Tia Chucha's Cultural Center in the San Fernando Valley, the only cultural hub for the poor, especially poor youth, in the region.

Luis describes the widespread impact of systemic racism in L.A.: "[Los Angeles] brought a lot of poor people, particularly in South Central L.A. and East L.A., together. These areas were created by Black and Brown labor brought in to work in the [steel mills, garment factories, auto plants, aerospace and defense] industries. Restrictive covenants in the 1930s and 1940s kept us in our own barrios. They kept the poor impoverished. Watts was born out of this, and most of South Central, most of Boyle Heights, most of East L.A. was created that way. Then deindustrialization hit LA very hard-- it lost 300 factories by 1984--and the most impacted communities were ours: South Central, Watts, East L.A. At the same time, the crack epidemic began. L.A. soon became the gang capital of the world. From 1980 to 2000, up to 15,000 young people were killed in the streets of L.A. due to the so-called gang wars and drug wars — Bloods, Crips, the large Mexican gangs that are now known around the country — were actually created by a system of poverty. Mass incarceration quickly followed. Today, California has the largest prison system in the country, upwards of 170,000 people are imprisoned and 75-80 percent are Black and Brown, even though Black and Brown people only make up 40 percent of the population."

It is important to note also that the policing of poor communities and communities of color continues to be fatal, as local police departments have become militarized and equipped with weapons from our wars. 50 years after the "Orangeburg Massacre," where police officers who killed three Black students were acquitted, young Black males remain nine times more likely to be killed by police officers than other Americans. Likewise, rates of police killings for Native American and Latinx men are disproportionately higher relative to White men. The shooters in these killings have rarely been convicted.

Revamped Surveillance and Social Control

Surveillance and social control has also evolved since the 1960s and 1970s. The COINTELPRO FBI program, which included the wiretapping of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's phones, monitored the lives of thousands and in many cases attempted to destroy organizations on national security grounds. While operations under the official COINTELPRO program ended in 1971, its tactics have evolved through various federal, state, and local initiatives. For example, the New York Police Department has engaged in a process of monitoring Muslim communities, religious institutions, student groups, poor people's organizations, and others since at least 2002.

In the 1990s, Broken Windows policing gained prominence, arguing that minor crimes were cause for interdiction and arrest, allegedly in order to prevent major incidents. However, the programs served as a thinly veiled pretext for harassing and imprisoning members of Black and Brown communities. For instance, in 2013, a Federal judge found that New York's police department unconstitutionally targeted communities of color through its "Stop and Frisk" program. At the height of the program, in 2011, police made 685,724 stops, of which 53 percent were of Black people and 34 percent were of Latinx people.

Surveillance of Muslim, immigrant, low-income, and Black and Brown communities has expanded with the use of new technologies. In 2003, the Department of Homeland Security's Special Registration program required over 80,000 Muslim men to present themselves for fingerprinting, eye scans, and questioning. The 2001 U.S.A. PATRIOT Act clause against the "material support" of terrorism has been used to selectively criminalize actions like donating money to specific charities, attending events, and otherwise lawful activities. Meanwhile, the enlistment of state and local policing agencies in immigration enforcement amid stepped up deportations further forced immigrants underground.

THE REAL VIOLENCE IN AMERICA IS STARVATION, UNEMPLOYMENT, SLUM HOUSING AND POOR EDUCATION.

— CORETTA SCOTT KING, 1968

POVERTY & INEQUALITY

IN THE ECONOMY OF THE 21ST CENTURY, ONLY A TINY PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION IS IMMUNE FROM THE POSSIBILITY THAT THEY COULD FALL INTO POVERTY AS A RESULT OF BAD BREAKS BEYOND THEIR OWN CONTROL. THE AMERICAN DREAM IS QUICKLY BECOMING THE AMERICAN ILLUSION.

- PHILIP ALSTON, U.N. SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS, 2017

At the time of the 1968 Poor People's Campaign, many in the U.S. were still experiencing the post-war economic boom that, coupled with a wave of social movement organizing, resulted in real gains in wages and living conditions. As a result of popular struggle and especially the Civil Rights Movement, the Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act, Immigration and Nationality Act, and the war on poverty programs, public attention and resources were directed towards civil rights, education, employment, health care, social security, and food security.

Although racial, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and geographic disparities remained, these social programs—and the people, movements and organizations that fought for them—ensured that the gains from an expanding economy were more widely distributed than they otherwise would have been. The systems of oppression created by white supremacy, patriarchy, and other structures that suppressed so many had not yet been dismantled, but the days of Jim Crow seemed behind and hard-won gains in the arenas of civil rights and economic equality poised to continue.

However, since that time there has been a reversal of many of those gains. Beginning in the 1970s, wages for the bottom 80 percent have largely remained stagnant, while the costs of basic needs like housing, health care, food, and gas have risen. Domestic labor markets entered into a global "race to the bottom." The quantity and quality of jobs in this country began a steady decline. Deindustrialization spread, most deeply hitting the Midwest and parts of the South and West coast that were industrial centers of the economy in earlier decades.

During the next 30 years, the U.S. economy became increasingly polarized. We have witnessed the historic destruction of the former middle class. Public goods like education, health care, and water were privatized. Even as assistance programs like the Children's Health Insurance Program and the Earned Income Tax Credit were added to the safety net, the critical cash assistance program was effectively dismantled when it became block granted to the states by so-called "welfare reform" legislation in the mid-1990s. Attacks on the safety net were often achieved using racist appeals, by both Democratic and Republican parties alike. Financial deregulation allowed banks to engage in increasingly speculative investments and led to the housing bubble and financial crisis of 2007-2008.

In the "Great Recession" years that followed, there were sustained attacks on the New Deal and Great Society programs and an ideological shift away from government accountability for the general welfare. Walmart emerged as the single largest employer in the country and emblematic of the widening inequality: its shelves are stocked with goods produced by exploited workers in poor countries, its U.S. workers represent the single largest group of food stamp recipients, and the six members of the Walton family own as much wealth as nearly 43 percent of American families.

During these years, racial wealth gaps have widened and patterns of gentrification pushed the poor, especially poor people of color in urban centers, further away from jobs, transportation, education and other services. The percentage of people living in deep or extreme poverty has increased since 1975. By 2016, 46 percent of people living in poverty had incomes less than half of the poverty line.

Women, children, and LGBTQ populations continued to fall into poverty. Rural economies were left behind.

This chapter will take a closer look at these conditions and at how poverty has changed over the last 50 years.

Section I: What Does it Mean to Be Poor In the United States?

The 1968 Poor People's Campaign was launched four years after President Lyndon Johnson declared a "war on poverty." 50 years later, there is good and bad news in the struggle to eradicate poverty.

The good news is that federal "social safety net" programs have proven effective in reducing poverty overall. In 2012, for instance, government programs providing nutrition and early education assistance, health coverage, access to affordable housing, employment and income supports, the child support program, and refundable tax credits cut the poverty rate to half of what it would have been without such programs. In fact, the effectiveness of the social safety net in 2012 was 10 times that of what it was in 1967.

The bad news is that poverty still plagues the multiracial population of poor people. The official poverty rate for all Americans was 19 percent in 1964 and 12.7 percent in 2016, but nearly all of that reduction came in the years following the introduction of War on Poverty programs. Compared to 1968, today's official poverty rate is virtually unchanged. And because our population has grown by more than 122 million people in these years, this means that there are 15 million more poor people today than there were 50 years ago. Further, "deep poverty," defined as having income below half the federal poverty level, has risen from 3.7 percent in 1975 (earliest available) to 5.8 percent in 2016.

Measuring Poverty

The U.S. Census Bureau uses two primary means of measuring poverty: the Official Poverty Measure (OPM) and the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM). The Official Poverty Measure is an income-based standard that uses the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) to define poverty. The FPL for 2016 quantifies poverty for a single person younger than age 65 as having an annual income of $12,486 or less. For a single person above 65, it is $11,511, and for a household of two adults and two children it is $24,339. By the Official Poverty Measure (OPM), more than 95 million Americans (nearly 30 percent of the total population) are either in poverty or considered "low-income" (living below twice the poverty line). That number rises to 140 million people (43.5 percent) when using the SPM, which takes into account federal assistance resources, such as refundable tax credits, as well as critical out-of-pocket expenses for food, clothing, housing, and utilities. It also takes into account geographic differences in costs of living.

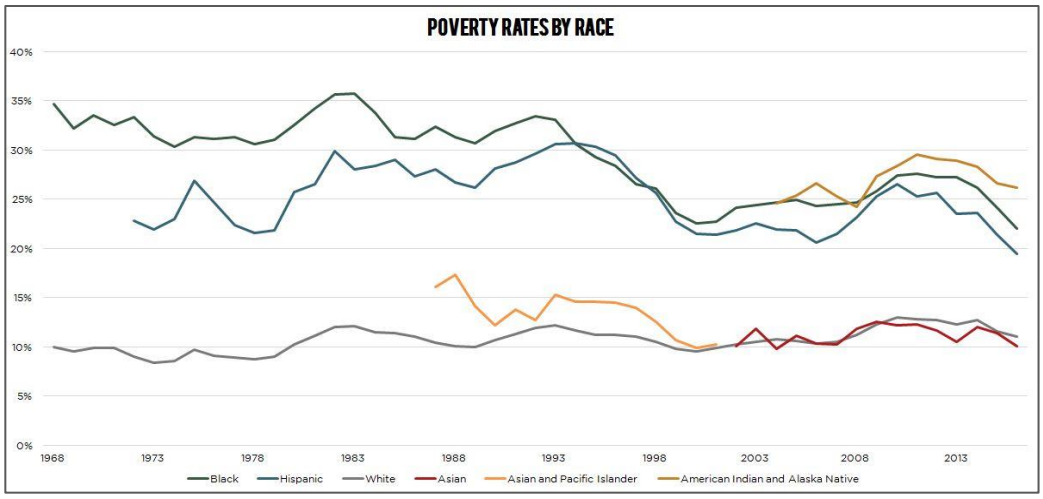
Due to the availability of data, for most of the statistics used in this section, this report uses the OPM. However, where possible, the SPM is used to help illustrate the broader extent of economic hardship people are facing and to show how effective the safety net has been in keeping people from falling below the federal poverty line.

Section II: Who Is Poor in the U.S.?

Poverty touches every demographic of our society. There were 40.6 million poor people in the United States in 2016. White people made up 42.5 percent of the poor (17.2 million). The next two largest groups were Latinx at 27.4 percent (11.1 million) and Black people at 22.7 percent (9.2 million) of those in poverty. Asian Americans made up 4.7 percent (1.9 million) of the nation's poor.

People of color are disproportionately impacted by poverty. In terms of examining poverty rates within racial groups, Native Americans and Alaskan Natives have the highest rate of poverty, at 26.2 percent. Black people have the second highest intraracial poverty rate, at 22 percent. This is followed by Latinx people (19.4 percent), White people (11 percent), and Asian Americans (10.1 percent). For the nation as a whole, the poverty rate using the OPM was 12.7 percent and using the SPM was 14.0 percent.

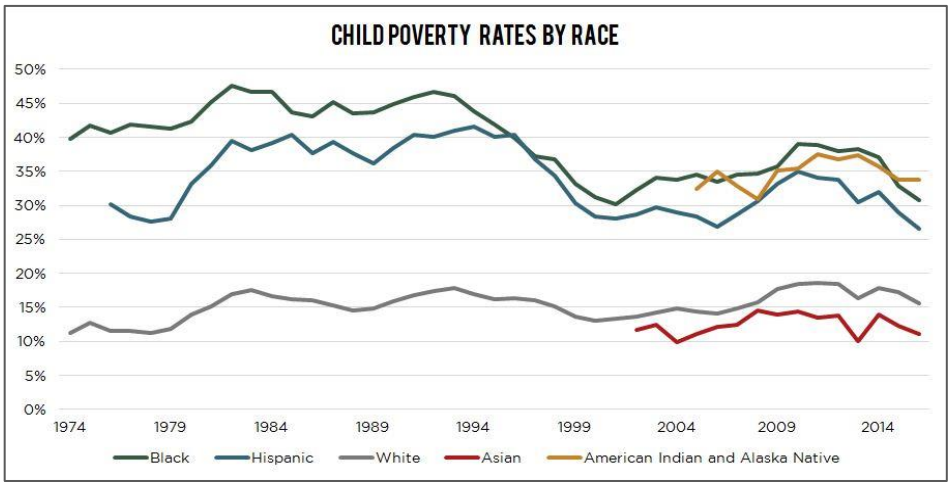
Figure 2.1



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Data for American Indian and Alaska Native population is from the American Community Survey.

The vast majority of poor people in 2016, almost 62 percent, were adults between the age of 18 and 64. Children below the age of 18 made up 23 percent of the nation's poor in 2016 (or 13.3 million people). Children tend to be disproportionately represented among the poor as compared to adults: one in five children is poor in the U.S. versus one in eight adults. Eighteen percent of all children in the U.S. under the age of 18 are poor and just as many live in food-insecure households. If using the SPM, 15.2 percent of children were poor in 2016.

Figure 2.2



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

According to calculations by the Urban Institute using data derived from the Panel Study on Income Dynamics between 1968 and 2009, almost four in 10 children spend at least one year of their lives in poverty before they turn 18.

The more than 13 million children who spent 2016 in poverty were disproportionately children of color. Analysis from Economic Policy Institute showed that poverty affected 33.8 percent of Native American children, 30.8 percent of Black children, and 26.6 percent of Latinx children in 2016. The poverty rate for White children was 10.8 percent. More than 25 percent of immigrant children experienced poverty in 2016.

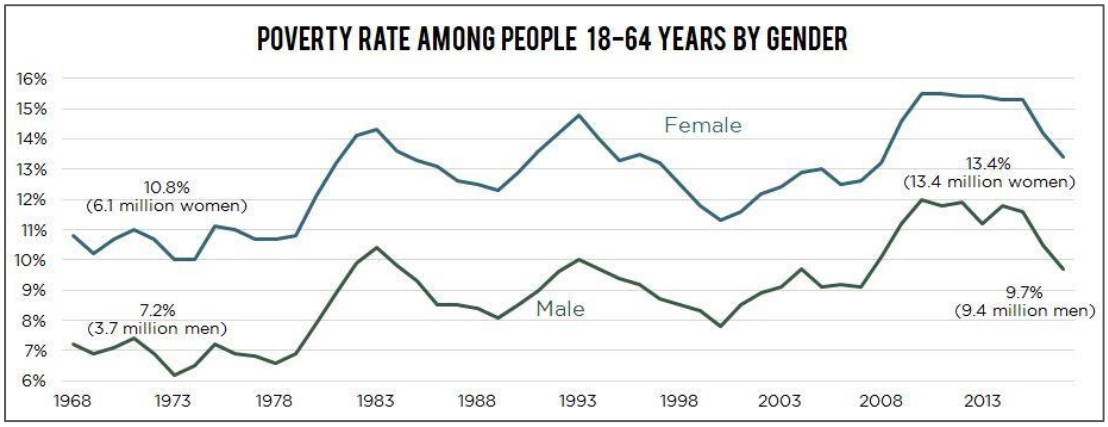
While the SPM for children in poverty in 2016 is 15.2 percent—2.8 percent lower than the OPM—the SPM for children living between 100 to 200 percent of the poverty threshold is 36.7 percent, significantly higher than the OPM of 21 percent. This means that according to the SPM, 51.9 percent of children are poor or low-income.

Poverty rates for women are higher than those for men in all age groups. In 2016, 13.4 percent of women aged 18-64 (representing 13.4 million women) were living below the poverty line, compared to just 9.7 percent of adult men in this age group (9.4 million men). Households led by single women with children in 2016 had a poverty rate of 35.6 percent, according to calculations from the National Women's Law Center, which was more than twice the 17.3 percent rate for households led by single men with children.

Poverty was a particularly acute problem for women of color: the National Women's Law Center determined that 21.4 percent of Black women, 18.7 percent of Latinx women, and 22.8 percent of Native American women were among the poor in 2016. Slightly more than 16 percent of immigrant women lived in poverty. Almost ten percent of White women (9.7 percent) lived in poverty in 2016.

Adult women with disabilities experienced a poverty rate that was more than twice that for adult women without disabilities (30.7 percent versus 12 percent).

Figure 2.3



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Households led by single mothers comprised almost 30 percent of families in 2016 with incomes below the poverty line for the past twelve months. Poverty rates for families headed by Black women and for families headed by Latinx women were 38.8 percent and 40.8 percent, respectively, in 2016. The poverty rate for families led by Native American women was 42.6 percent. Almost 42 percent of families headed by immigrant women experienced poverty in 2016. Although it was lower compared to that of families led by women of color, the poverty rate in 2016 for families led by White women was 30.2 percent.

Members of the LGBTQ communities are disproportionately represented among the poor as well. Using data from the 2006 to 2010 National Survey of Family Growth, the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law calculated that 25.9 percent of bisexual men and 20.5 percent of gay men experienced poverty, compared to 15.3 percent of heterosexual men. Similarly, 29.4 percent of bisexual women and 22.7 percent of gay women lived in poverty, while 21.1 percent of heterosexual women did so.

The National Center for Transgender Equality's 2015 Transgender Survey found that transgender people experience poverty at a rate double than that of the general population, with transgender people of color experiencing even higher rates. Of the survey's respondents, 43 percent of Latinx, 41 percent of Native American, 40 percent of multiracial and 38 percent of Black transgender respondents lived in poverty in 2015. Further, over half of transgender people with disabilities and transgender people living with HIV lived in poverty in 2015.

Areas with concentrated poverty—defined by a high percentage of poor people living within a geographic area, usually 40 percent or more within a given Census tract—pose a unique set of issues, as essential resources such as access to quality healthcare, education, and public amenities are often tied to the wealth of neighborhoods. Overall, American neighborhoods have significantly increased

in economic segregation since 1970, with the number of families living in high-poverty or high-affluent neighborhoods doubling from 15 to 34 percent by 2012. The percentage of White people in poverty living in high-poverty neighborhoods has increased throughout this time, although Black people in poverty are more than twice as likely as their White counterparts to live in high-poverty neighborhoods. While these trends are present across the country, concentrated poverty has particularly increased in the southern region of the United States (Figures 2.4 and 2.5).

Figure 2.4

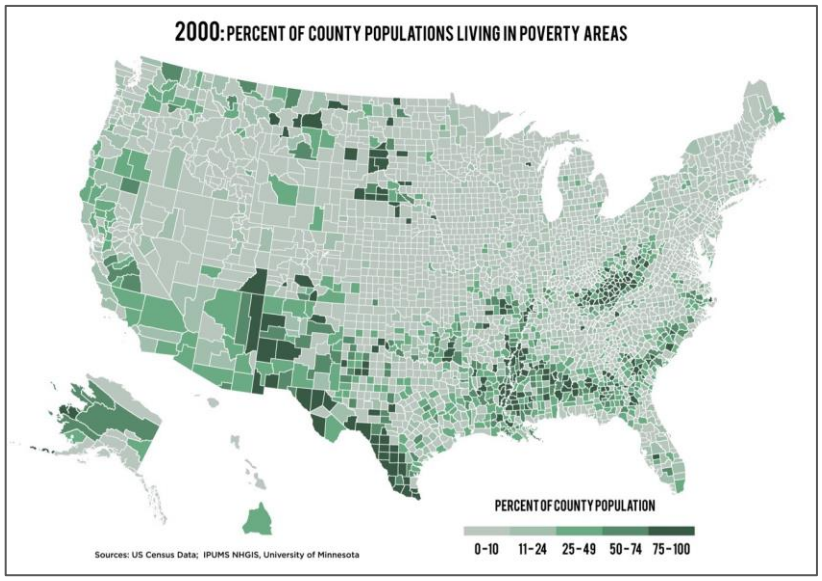
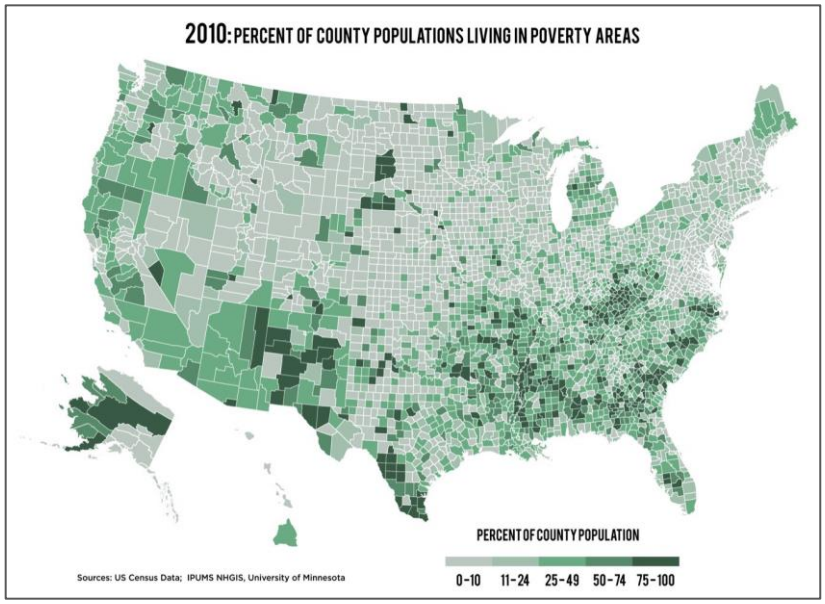


Figure 2.5



Rural poverty is persistently worse than urban poverty in the U.S. In 2015, the rate of poverty in rural areas was 16.7 percent compared to 13 percent in cities and 10.8 percent in suburbs. In the 1980s, unemployment was worse in cities than rural areas. Unemployment has become a greater problem today in rural communities. Rural workers are poorer than urban workers, and nearly one-third of them live in deep poverty. Nearly 20 percent of rural workers live in households earning below 150 percent of the poverty level compared to 13.5 percent of urban workers with the same income levels.

Rural communities also often struggle with a lack of access to technology infrastructure. Among rural residents, 27.4 percent do not have access to 25 Mbps broadband, compared to 0.6 percent of city residents. This disparity is primarily produced by market dynamics, as companies cannot justify building telecommunications infrastructure in low-density areas due to lower profits. Access to digital broadband is also shaped by income, as broadband service in America is relatively more expensive compared to other countries. As a result of these factors, 31.4 percent of households whose annual incomes fall below $50,000 and with children ages 6 to 17 do not have a high-speed internet connection at home. This digital divide puts children at an educational disadvantage, while significantly restricting adults' ability to access essential information, such as job opportunities or social services.

Section III: The Safety Net and Welfare Reform

While spending on federal public programs has grown, between 1970 and 2010 nearly all of the growth in federal social safety net spending came from “social insurance” programs, such as Social Security, Medicare, unemployment insurance, workers’ compensation, and disability insurance (see Figure 2.6). Benefits based on recipients’ income that are aimed at assisting the poor—otherwise known as “means tested” programs—have grown less rapidly, especially once Medicaid is discounted. This shift has meant that in 2014, a family of four earning $11,925 per year likely received less aid than a family of four earning $47,700.

Programs that had been effective at reducing poverty were scaled back and, as the mechanism of funding changed through issuing block grants to states, fewer resources made their way to poor families. The impact of these changes extended beyond solely welfare recipients. Former beneficiaries of AFDC were pushed into the labor market, forming a section of the working poor. The reshaping of the economy, described in Section IV of this chapter, produced punishing results for this new segment of workers who faced lower unionization rates, low or absent wage growth, and increasingly concentrated political and economic power in the hands of their employers.

The Impact of Workfare and Welfare Reform: Margaret Prescod, Every Mother is a Working Mother Network

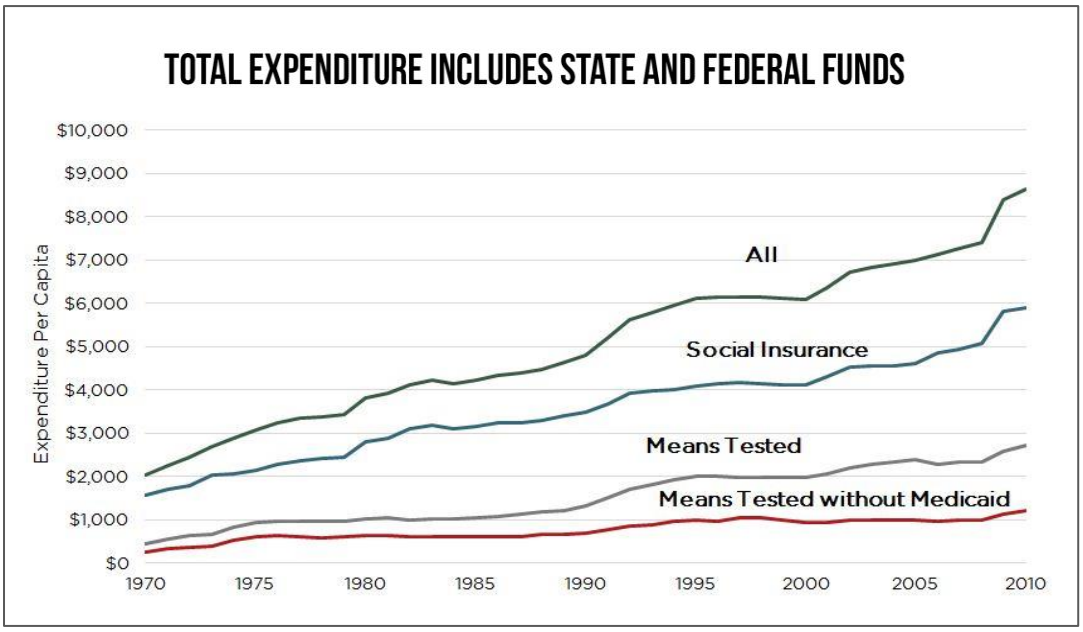
Margaret Prescod has been involved with the National Welfare Rights Organization and state-based welfare rights organizations for the past four decades, including during the debate over workfare programs introduced in the 1990s. As part of Every Mother is a Working Mother Network in California, she continues in the struggle for poor mothers and families.

"Workfare was upsetting on several fronts, but mainly it separated the poverty of children from the poverty of mothers. Since the passage of welfare reform, we've seen a devastation in our communities…..[when] I was working as a young teacher in Brownsville, it was the mothers on welfare who had the time to come down to the school to make sure their children were learning, to make sure there was free breakfast. The image of welfare mothers as lazy scroungers doing nothing all day couldn't be farther from the truth. With welfare reform, these mothers went into workfare and that whole sector of mothers in low-income communities who were in so many ways the glue, fighting for their kids, they were withdrawn from that role….but eliminating the poverty of women is the key to eliminating the poverty of children.

…What increasingly happened [with welfare reform] was that monies that would previously go to mothers on AFDC, and therefore to families headed by single mothers, got sucked into child welfare agencies and states were using those resources for child custody, foster care, and adoption services. Instead of going to support mothers with their housing or other basic needs, children are being taken away and placed in foster care, or are up for adoption, not because they are abused or neglected but because they are poor.

The fact is that mothers on welfare or even single mothers are viewed as outside the sphere of production in the U.S. So you only focus on people who are considered "productive." But studies have shown that there is considerable economic value to unwaged, caregiving work….and when welfare goes up, it pushes up the minimum wage. When welfare is cut, you have all these people who are like free labor that can undermine labor unions. This relationship between our rights as mothers to welfare and the impact on workers at the point of production has not been appreciated."

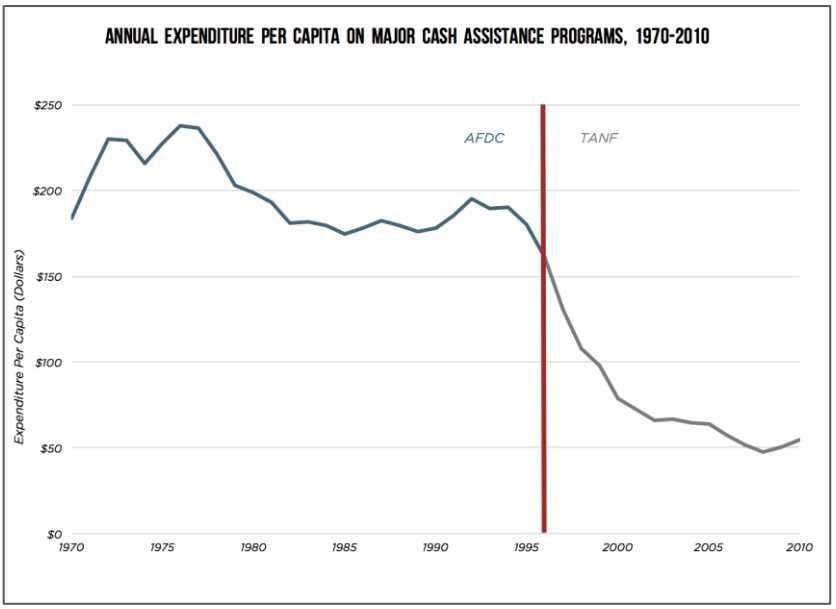
Figure 2.6



Source: Various administrative sources. Originally published by Robert Moffitt in The Great Recession and the Social Safety Net and The Deserving Poor, the Family, and the U.S. Welfare System. Total expenditure includes state and federal funds.

By far the greatest reduction in federal spending for low-income families came with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996, which eliminated Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and replaced it with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF drastically reduced resources available to families in poverty and imposed unrealistic work requirements (Figure 12.7). Under Aid to Families with Dependent Children, in 1996, 68 percent of families with children living in poverty were aided by the program, compared with the 23 percent of poor families that TANF reaches today. In all but three states, TANF benefits have declined since 1996 in real value, with monthly benefits in all 50 states and the District of Columbia at or below two-thirds of the federal poverty line.

Figure 2.7



Source: Various administrative sources. Originally published by Robert Moffitt in The Great Recession and the Social Safety Net and The Deserving Poor, the Family, and the U.S. Welfare System.

Women and Children Take the Lead: The National Welfare Rights Organization

The National Welfare Rights Organization was founded in 1966 to organize for adequate income, dignity, justice, and democratic participation. It brought together smaller organizations of welfare recipients and its members were mainly women and their children who were fighting for the right to welfare.

Women from the welfare rights movement took up prominent leadership in the 1968 Campaign, including informing Dr. King and others on critical issues around welfare legislation. Michigan Welfare Rights Organization (MWRO) was one of the founding members of the NWRO and several of its current leaders keep that legacy alive today.

Sylvia Orduño is among a new generation of MWRO activists and describes how welfare reform impacted welfare rights organizing: "In the 1960s and 1970s, recipients receiving public assistance weren't burdened with workfare requirements in order to maintain their benefits. Welfare rights chapters and other grassroots groups were able to get people to do paid work in the community and the office, and to learn how to talk to and mobilize others around their right to a decent quality of life. Today, with federal TANF time limits, funding changes, and program shifts to the states, plus other cuts (many adults are too young for social security benefits and too old or ill for fast-moving assembly line or retail work, which requires long hours on your feet) welfare rights organizing is in crisis…There used to be over 500 welfare rights chapters and affiliated groups. Now, there are less than two dozen."

MWRO continues the fight today for welfare benefits, the right to water and keeping families together.

Three of the most notable federal programs that work well for poor families are the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), previously known as "food stamps;" the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC); and the Child Tax Credit. SNAP remains one of the most effective means-tested government assistance programs that reaches most families experiencing financial hardship. Its benefits also rise to meet difficult financial times. In 2016, SNAP benefitted about 20 million children a month, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. A recent Urban Institute report found that the anti-poverty effects of SNAP are even higher than previously estimated. By correcting for underreporting of benefits, the Institute found that the program reduced the number of people living in poverty by 17 percent, or 8.4 million, in 2015. Among families with Black children, the reduction was 21 percent.

In 2015, the Earned Income Tax Credit, EITC, effectively lifted about 6.5 million people above the federal poverty line, half of whom were children. Another 21 million people living in poverty benefited from the credit, further reducing the effects of poverty.

In addition to keeping families out of poverty and increasing food security, these benefits form the crucial foundation for better economic and physical health. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the federal social safety net reduces the poverty rate by nearly half when measured by the SPM, but many assistance programs aimed at poor families continue to hold an unwarranted reputation for being ineffective.

Criminalizing Public Benefits

There have long existed assumptions that people who are in need of public assistance have character flaws such as laziness and lack of a moral compass that have made them poor. This myth has nowhere been more vicious than when cast upon Black female heads of household. From the Moynihan Report in 1965, to Ronald Reagan's racist depiction of the mythical "welfare queen," to Clinton's 1996 welfare reform and present day calls for mandatory drug-testing in order to receive public benefits, poor heads of families—especially single mothers—have been demonized and treated like recalcitrant children in need of character-building.

However, what the false picture of the "welfare queen" covers up are the underlying factors that create and perpetuate economic need among the poor. Such factors include poor jobs and low wages, lack of affordable and safe child care, a segregated educational system that adversely affects poor students, particularly those of color, the impact of the criminal justice system on the poor, especially on poor people of color, and overall, the system of white supremacy that divides and oppresses the poor.

As Peter Edelman writes in his recent book, Not a Crime to be Poor: The Criminalization of Poverty in America, "Welfare reform joined mass incarceration as a way to do racial politics [...] jail for the

men and ending welfare for women and children." The constant and increasing policing of poor people serve as a mechanism for social control. Public assistance applicants are finger-printed, run through a database search for outstanding warrants, urine-tested, background checked, spot house checked, and more. Police even rely on these social service records to criminalize poor people when they are stopped for traffic violations or municipal code violations.

Margaret Prescod from Every Mother is a Working Mother Network describes the injustice of these characterizations: "The majority of welfare recipients are White, not Black, but every time a politician wants to cut welfare, they bring up the myth of the Black welfare queen. The welfare rights movement was a multiracial movement. It still is today."

Marian Kramer from NRWO and MWRO recalls organizing the diverse population of welfare recipients forty years ago: "Back in the 1970s, workers who were laid off had to line up for food stamps. The United Auto Workers called us to come out and help them get their members on food stamps. We went out to Wayne County Community College and trained some 300 people how to get their welfare benefits – this was a multiracial group that was mainly men! And then a week after that training, the sheriff's department called me….They had put my information up on their bulletin board because so many of their deputies needed welfare. These were, again, people of different ethnic groups, people who had boats, cars, trucks, all that stuff, but now they weren't being paid because of a struggle between the county and the state. One deputy called me and said, 'I'm down here [at the welfare office], they've turned me down twice. I have children to feed and this time I brought my pistol. Do you think that will help?' I told him to stand down, and let me take over."

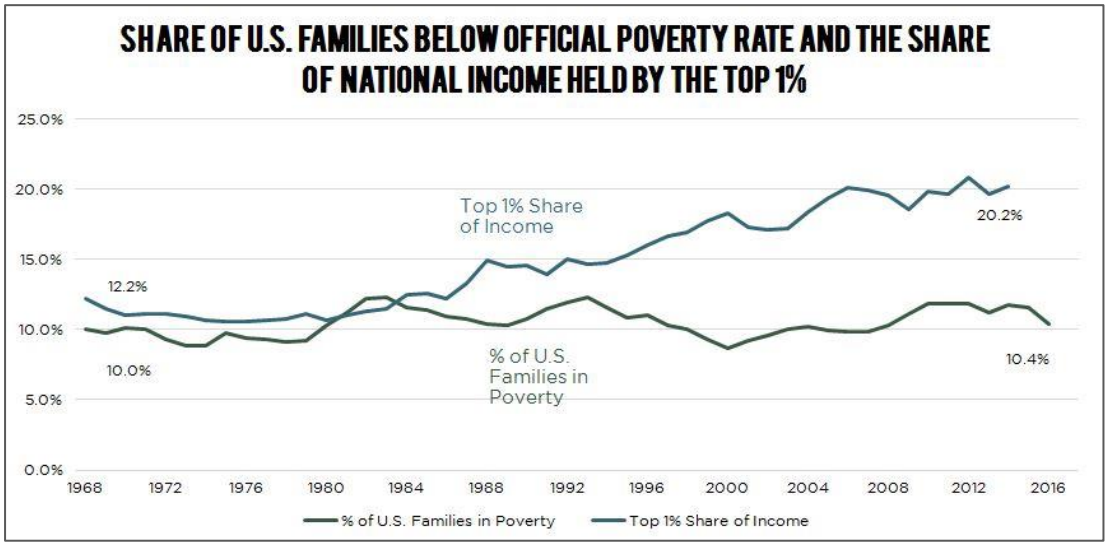
This diversity remains true today. In 2011, Owsley County, Kentucky, which is 94.9 percent White, had among the highest recipient rates for food stamps in the U.S. 52 percent of residents received food stamps. If benefits are slashed, this county, too, will face hardship.

Section IV: Why Are We Poor?

Growing Divide Between Rich and Poor

Between 1968 and 2016, U.S. GDP grew more than eighteen-fold, but the rising tide did not lift all boats. The top 1 percent's share of national income has nearly doubled while the official poverty rate for all U.S. families has merely inched up and down. Despite the country's economic growth, poverty persisted and in many places deepened. The extreme concentration of income and wealth at the top has not only siphoned resources away from those at the bottom end. It has also increased the political power of the ultra-rich, which they've used to shape trade, tax, labor, health care, campaign finance, and other policies in their interest.

Figure 2.8



Sources: Institute for Policy Studies analysis based on Thomas Piketty and U.S. Census.

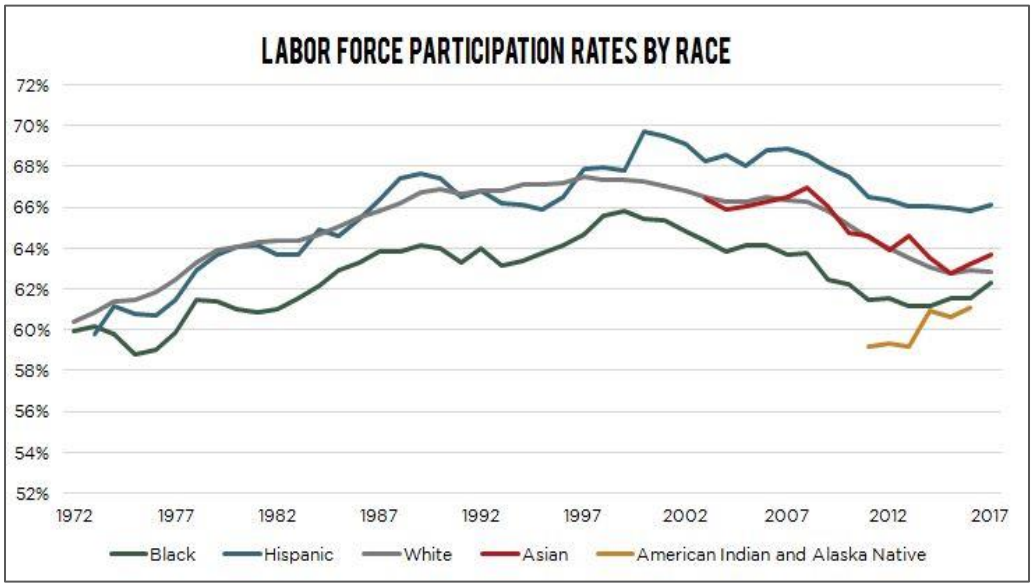
A key factor in the growing economic divide in the U.S. is the changing character of the job market. Although the country is experiencing low levels of unemployment, low wage work that features little job security has shaped the rise in employment in the past few decades. Over 2.9 million workers are currently employed in temporary help services, approximately double the share of the total workforce employed by such agencies in 1990. Median pay for temp workers is about $3.40 an hour less than comparable direct-hire work, and there is evidence that health and safety conditions are significantly worse. More broadly, private sector employment in low-wage industries made up a disproportionate share of job gains in the first years of recovery after the 2008 crash. Between 2010 and 2014, 44 percent of new jobs gained were in these industries, compared to 26 percent of job growth in mid-wage industries.

Such changes to the U.S. economy indicate a larger pattern of inequality that has emerged since the early 1970s. Economic policies that promoted industrial expansion, full employment, and an increased standard of living through empowered labor unions fell out of favor, and were exchanged for policies promoting geopolitical interests, corporate profits, and tax cuts for the wealthy. As a result, regions that were once prominent centers of industrial production have since experienced unemployment, jobless economic recoveries, and wage decline.

Racial disparities remain as well. Since 1968, the Black unemployment rate has persistently run about twice as high as the rate for White people. The unemployment rate, however, only counts those who are actively seeking work, leaving out those who have given up finding a job and those who are working part-time and would prefer full-time employment. Using a broader, more accurate measure of underemployment, the figures are even worse. Native American and Latinx populations fare only slightly better.

Further, among all working age Americans, labor force participation rates remain lower today than they were before the 2008 crisis. As seen in Figure 2.9, participation rates have dropped from 67.3 percent in 2000 to 62.7 percent in January 2018. Native Americans are an exception, but their participation rates are still lower than other racial groups.

Figure 2.9



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2016-2017 Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey (SIC). Data for American Indian and Alaska Native population is from the American Community Survey.

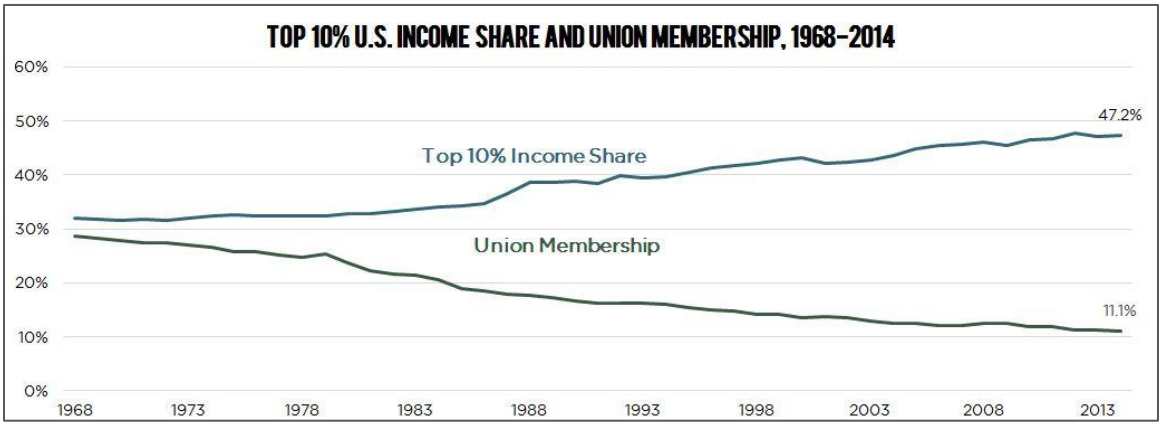
Dr. William Darity from Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy describes these changes in employment: "During the trial of the Great Recession, the ratio of people seeking work to the number of new job openings was approximately 7 to 1. It's far better today at 1.1 to 1, but that still means that we have a shortfall in excess of about 100,000 people who are seeking work relative to the number of jobs that are available in a given year...This is not just a question of the absence of quantity of work, but it's also a question of quality of work. Indeed, close to half the individuals who are homeless in the United States actually have jobs: the problem is the jobs pay very poorly. And we are now paying greater attention to the notion of precarity of work—that is to say jobs in which the individual has uncertain hours, fluctuations in payment, fluctuations in knowing exactly when they'll have work assignments, and the like....The absence of a sufficient number of jobs and the absence of high quality work opportunities creates toxic conditions that lead groups that have an insider position to fight to preserve their turf. This is the material basis for discrimination...against veterans, individuals who have some form of disability, individuals who have been previously exposed to unemployment, and racial discrimination directed against African Americans in the U.S."

Young men of color have long suffered from lower earnings and higher unemployment rates than young White men. As reported by the Urban Institute in 2015, Black and Latinx men in the 20-24 year age group experienced an improvement in unemployment rates between the early 1980s to late 1990s, but between 2000 and 2015, their employment rates and earnings declined once again.

Black people who lose their jobs are more likely to remain out of work for extended periods of time. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Black people made up 26 percent of the long-term unemployed in 2017 (out of work for 27 weeks or more), while making up only about 12.5 percent of the American labor force.

These structural changes to the labor market have been accompanied by anti-union policies like "right to work" laws in 28 states as of 2017 that have further undermined workers' power to bargain collectively. Between 1968 and 2017, the share of U.S. workers in unions fell from 24.9 percent to 10.7 percent.

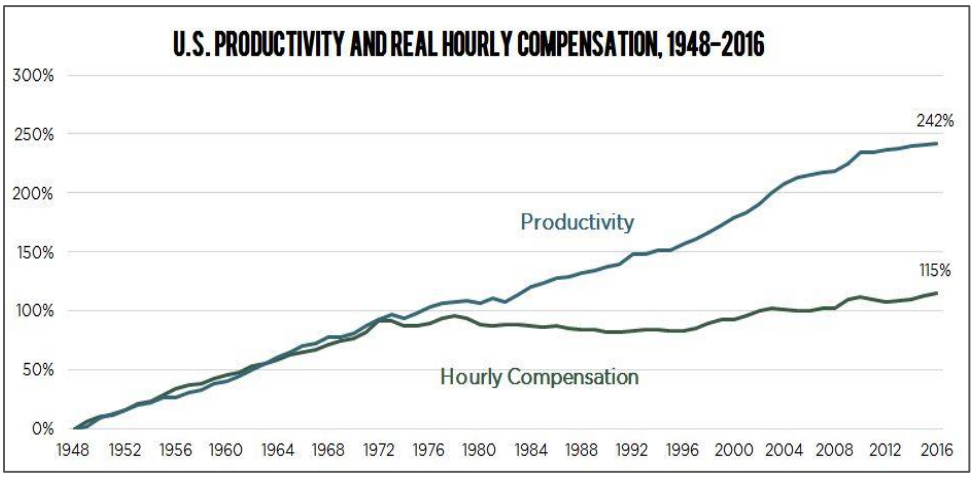
Figure 2.10



Source: Economic Policy Institute

One clear sign of labor's declining power is the sharp disconnect between wages and productivity. At the time of the 1968 Poor People's Campaign, productivity and wages had been rising in tandem for at least two decades. But beginning in the 1970s, employers no longer shared the benefits of improved productivity with their workers. Between 1973 and 2016, hourly compensation increased just 12.3 percent, while productivity increased 73.7 percent.

Figure 2.11



Source: Economic Policy Institute

In fact, U.S. wages, despite a small uptick in the last quarter of 2017, have been stagnating for more than three decades. While pay at the top has increased, typical American workers and the nation's lowest-wage workers have seen little or no growth in their real weekly wages. According to Oxfam and the Economic Policy Institute, around 58.3 million U.S. workers are earning below the living wage of $15 per hour. An Economic Policy Institute study shows Black men make 22 percent less and Black women make 34.2 percent less than White men in the same circumstances. Median wages for certain Asian and other groups like Bangladeshis, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, and Hmong also lag behind Whites, according to Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles.

A Low-Wage Economy Prompts Low-Wage Organizing

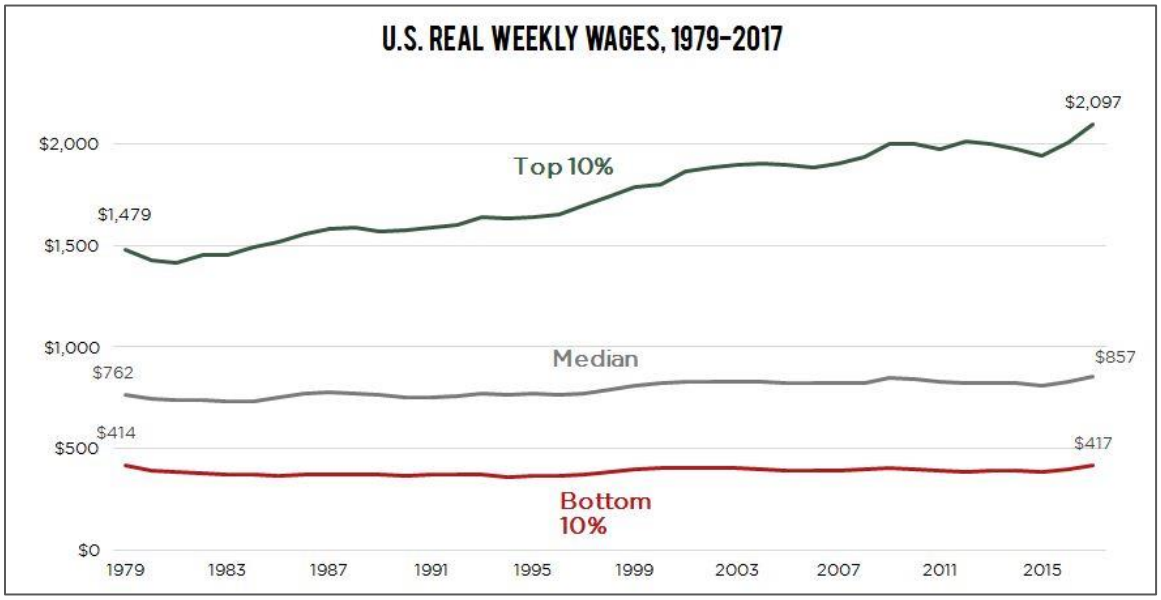
The Fight for $15 began in 2012 when 200 workers walked off their jobs in New York City to demand wages of $15 an hour and union rights. As a campaign of the Service Employees International Union, it now has chapters in more than 300 cities and six countries.

After trying a few different tactics, the Fight for $15 organized a concerted campaign against McDonald's. This was both an attempt to revive the strike to create a disruptive movement and to force a conversation around wages and union rights. McDonald's is the second-largest private employer in the world and the second-largest employer in the United States behind Walmart. The campaign against McDonald's was as much about this specific employer as it was about how the economy had been transformed into a low-wage economy and how this was tied to the decline of worker organizing and the power of working people in this country.

The Fight for $15 has also established a strong southern contingent, Raise Up for $15, which tackles the challenges of organizing low-wage workers across race in the southern United States. Black workers are overrepresented in low-wage industries in the south, yet 51 percent of fast food workers in the region are White.

One of the fastest growing occupations, particularly for women and people of color, has been in restaurant service. The subminimum wage for tipped workers has been stuck at just $2.13 per hour for more than 20 years, creating high levels of economic insecurity for these workers.

Figure 2.12



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Debt-strapped families and governments

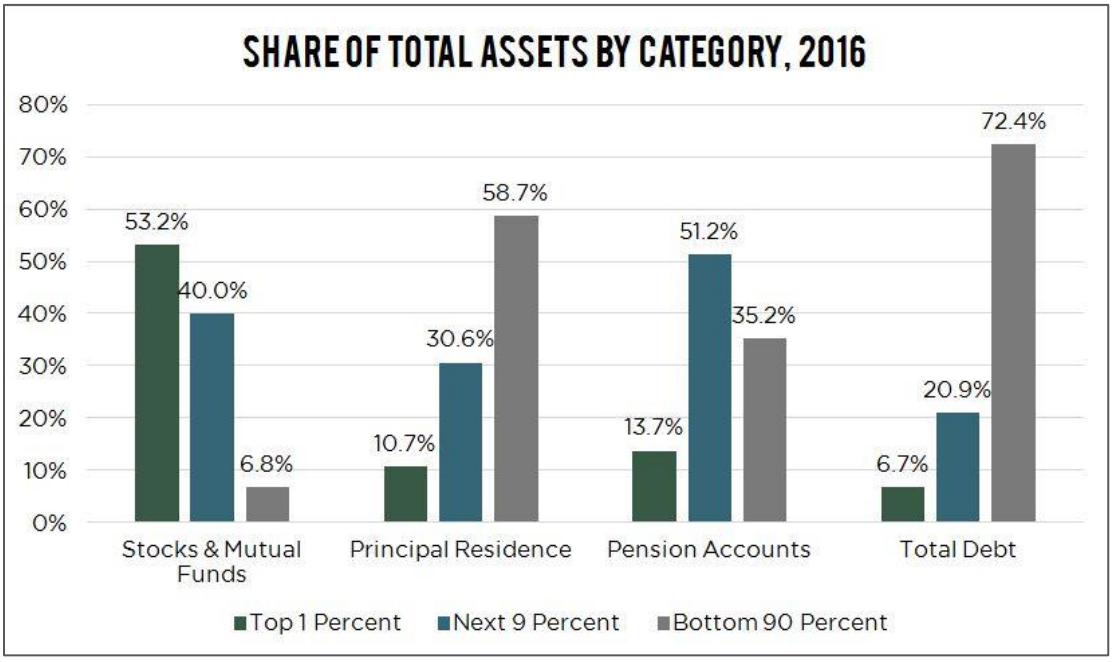
With wages stagnating, college costs increasing, and affordable housing evaporating, millions of American families were living "underwater" in 2016—meaning they have no wealth or their debts are larger than their assets. Excluding the value of the family car, 19 percent of U.S. households (23.9 million households) have zero or negative net worth. Thirty percent of Black households and 27 percent of Latinx households have zero or negative wealth, compared to 14 percent of White households.

Families face enormous stress when they have no financial reserves to help them get through difficulties such as job loss, illness, divorce, or car trouble. Even low- and middle-income families who do have some wealth often do not have any liquid assets—cash or savings—at their disposal. According to a new report by Prosperity Now, nearly four in 10 households (117 million people) have not saved enough to pay themselves a poverty-level income for three months in the event that a job loss or other emergency leaves them without any income. Meanwhile, the concentration of wealth at the top has become more extreme than ever. According to the Institute for Policy Studies, the 400 wealthiest Americans now own more wealth than the bottom 64 percent of the U.S. population (or

204 million people). These 400 wealthiest are predominantly White and include only two Black and five people with Latinx backgrounds.

The rich don't just have more wealth than everyone else. The bulk of their wealth comes from different—and more lucrative—asset sources. America's top 1 percent, for instance, holds more than half the national wealth invested in stocks and mutual funds, while the top 10 percent hold 93.2 percent of those assets. This means that while the stock market may be booming, it is not a reliable measure of how the economy is faring for most people in this country. The bottom 90 percent hold most of their wealth in housing, the asset category that took the biggest hit during the Great Recession. This bottom 90 percent of Americans also hold more than 70 percent of debt in this country, explaining the phenomenon of living "under water."

Figure 2.13



Source: Household Wealth Trends in the United States, 1962-2016

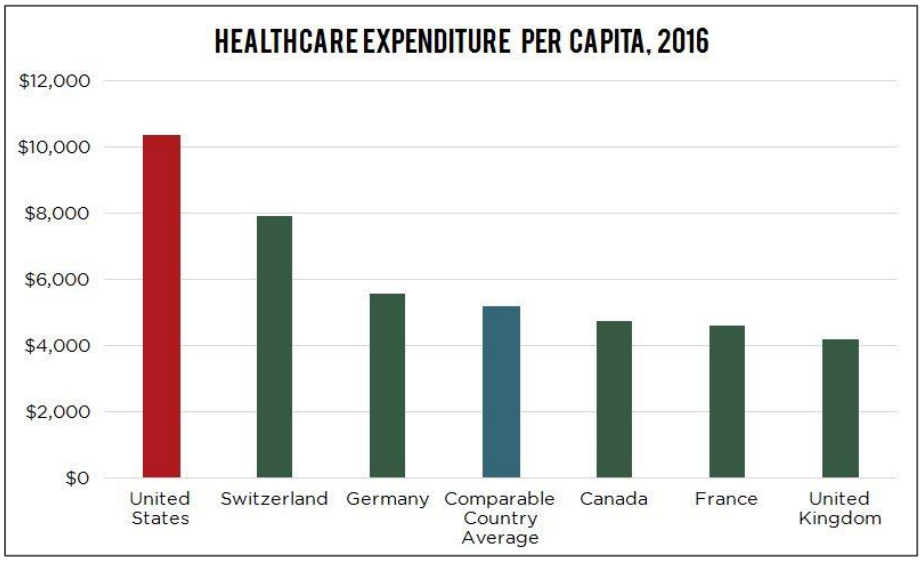
Throughout our country's history, the financial industry has played a major role in creating—and exploiting—economic distress. Racially discriminatory "redlining" in lending, which confines people of color to investment-starved, segregated neighborhoods, was rampant before the 1968 Civil Rights Act banned the practice and it still continues today. Another racially predatory practice—pushing high-risk loans on people of color—inflated the housing bubble that burst in 2008, leaving 9.3 million homeowners facing foreclosure. Nearly ten years later, in December 2017, there were more than 60,000 new foreclosure filings. Today, lawmakers acting on the financial industry's behalf are attempting to cripple the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the government agency established in the wake of the crash to stop such financial abuse.

Wall Street and other big corporations have also contributed to economic distress in cities and states by lobbying to block progressive taxes needed to properly fund public services. As Saqib Bhatti, Co-Executive Director of the Action Center on Race & the Economy (ACRE), has pointed out, big banks then turn around and "exploit these cash-strapped state and local governments through predatory financial deals, just like they targeted homeowners with predatory mortgages during the housing boom." To finance projects like bridges and schools, state and city governments sell municipal bonds. From Illinois to Kansas to Detroit and Puerto Rico, states and cities are slashing public services as they prioritize the Wall Street holders of these bonds over the needs of their residents.

Section V: The Impact of Poverty - Health Care

Health care provision is in crisis in the U.S. Driven by drug overdoses, life expectancy at birth in this country declined for the second consecutive year in 2016. This was the first time this had happened since 1962 and 1963. U.S. infant mortality rates in 2010 were among the highest in the developed world. This is despite the fact that the U.S. spends more money per capita on its health care— $10,348 per person—than any other wealthy country in the world.

Figure 2.14



Source: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The question of healthcare is often tied directly to financial hardship, even for those with health insurance. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, in 2016, 43 percent of adults with health insurance struggled to afford making their deductible payments, nearly 30 percent experienced difficulties affording medical bills, and 73 percent of the insured reported cutting back basic

household necessities and food in order to pay medical bills. The number one cause of personal bankruptcy in the United States is medical debt.

Put People First! PA has been organizing around the right to health care in small towns and cities across the state of Pennsylvania for the past five years. As co-founder Nijmie Dzurinko describes, "People are choosing between paying for medications and paying for utilities. They are stretching out medications, choosing between buying food and getting health care for their kids. This makes life very hard, when you need to choose between one need or another need, when they're really all needs. People are saying they are forced to stay in relationships because of insurance, because otherwise they won't have benefits. It's also a real question for workers, who are constantly bargaining away their other rights for their healthcare."

While the Affordable Care Act (ACA) led to historic gains in health insurance coverage, reducing the number of nonelderly uninsured people from 44 million in 2013 to about 28 million by the end of 2016, the downward trend reversed in 2017, which saw the single largest one-year increase as 3.2 million people were added to the rolls of the uninsured. The distribution of the uninsured remains statistically the same: Latinx and Black people were disproportionately uninsured at rates of 16.9 percent (10.2 million) and 11.7 percent (4.6 million), respectively, versus 7.6 percent (13.6 million) for White people. The new tax law enacted in December 2017 eliminated the ACA's individual mandate, which is expected to raise costs and lead to an additional 13 million people losing their insurance over the next decade.

Individuals without health care are more likely to suffer poorer health outcomes, greater limitations in their quality of life, and higher rates of premature death. The majority of the uninsured (75 percent) come from families with at least one full-time worker, but with incomes too low to cover their health care and, presumably, other needs. A lack of means to afford insurance strongly corresponds to a lack of access to health insurance options. About 80 percent of the uninsured in 2016 were in families that had incomes that were lower than 400 percent of the poverty level.

Universal Health Care and Single Payer Health Care in Vermont

Universal healthcare is considered a fundamental human right in the World Health Organization's (WHO) constitution of 1948. WHO defines universal coverage to mean that "all people and communities can use the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship."

According to Dean Baker, an economist with the Center for Economic and Policy Research, "Single-payer systems have been successful in providing universal care to the populations of the countries that have them, and doing so at a far lower cost than in the United States." Per-person healthcare costs in Canada are just 47 percent of the costs in the United States. The per-person cost for the single-payer system in the United Kingdom, where healthcare is provided directly by the government, is 42 percent of the U.S. system. These and other single-payer countries also perform better than the United States on broad outcome measures like life expectancy and infant mortality and are comparable on more narrow measures like survival rates from various types of cancer and other disease.

The Vermont Workers' Center (VWC) is a grassroots organization whose members played an integral role in the state's 2011 enactment of a single-payer health care law. This law was ultimately abandoned in 2014, but the struggle for health care continues. Liz Betty Owens, a member of the VWC, describes the challenges she faced to maintain her health care and receive treatment for Lyme disease: "I began the three and a half month process of registering for my state's Medicare program…And ever since I was accepted, I've had to try and tread a careful line making sure I don't make too much money and get booted off the state plan, risking fines from lack of health insurance, and again not having access to the care that I need…. As weather patterns continue to hit new extremes through climate change and the Northeast continues to warm, the number of infected tick bugs—and the risk of Lyme disease—is only expected to grow. The people at the greatest risk are those of us who work outdoors, growing food, working on farms, maintaining state and federal lands. And our heightened risk to this disease is made even more terrifying by the continued threat of our already limited access to healthcare."

Uninsured rates vary significantly by state, depending on whether state governments opted to participate in the ACA's Medicaid expansion, which extended eligibility to those living at or below 138 percent of the poverty line ($28,180 for a family of three). The 32 states (including the District of Columbia) that participated in the Medicaid expansion have seen higher coverage gains than the 19 that did not. In fact, an estimated 64 percent of the coverage gains brought about by the Affordable Care Act occurred in states that expanded Medicaid.

Failure to adopt Medicaid expansion creates a coverage gap for those with incomes too high for Medicaid eligibility but too low to afford insurance in the marketplaces. Almost 2.4 million Americans fall into this coverage gap, and the vast majority, 89 percent, live in Southern states. Of this total, 27 percent live in Texas, 16 percent in Florida, 10 percent in Georgia, and nine percent in North Carolina. Nationally, 48 percent of those in the insurance gap are White, 24 percent are Black, and 24 percent are Latinx.

These gaps have devastating consequences. Callie Greer from Montgomery, Alabama, lost her daughter, Venus, to breast cancer that went undetected for months due to a lack of insurance. Venus

visited the ER more than 25 times. At one of these visits, the ER doctor walked into her room and realized her breast tissue was deteriorating. She died in 2013 when a tumor in her brain ruptured. As Callie later explained, "No one should have to bury their child in America because they don't have health insurance."

The Crisis of Rural Hospitals

In July 2014 Portia Gibbs of Belhaven in rural North Carolina had a heart attack. Just days before, Vidant Health, a private non-profit corporation, had closed the hospital nearest to her home, citing cost reasons. Portia died waiting for a helicopter to be air-lifted to the closest emergency care facility, an hour's drive away.

In response to the hospital closure in Belhaven, in 2014 and 2015, the Republican Mayor of Belhaven, Adam O'Neal, civil rights veteran Bob Zellner, and people from the Moral Mondays/Forward Together movement and the Kairos Center walked 283 miles from Belhaven to Washington, D.C., to raise awareness of this crisis facing rural communities.

Since 2005, more than 120 rural hospitals have been closed. Between 2010 and 2018, there have been 83 hospital closures across 26 states, most of them in southern states. National Rural Health Association CEO Alan Morgan estimates 700 additional closings in the coming decade. These closures are part of the demise of rural communities and economies, indicating a failure of public investment, infrastructure, and access to critical health services.

Section VI: The Impact of Poverty – Housing and Homelessness

Redlining and Homeless Organizing in Philadelphia

50 years after the enactment of the Fair Housing Act, America's banks are redlining and lending in a racially discriminatory manner, with increasingly less oversight. According to analysis by Reveal from The Center for Investigative Reporting, Black applicants were denied conventional home loans at significantly higher rates than Whites in 48 cities, Latinx in 25, Asians in nine, and Native Americans in three. In Philadelphia, Whites received 10 times as many mortgages as Blacks, despite these two racial groups making up equal shares of the city's population. Banks located three-fourths of their branches in the city's majority White neighborhoods.

The Kensington Welfare Rights Union (KWRU) in Philadelphia has been a leading force against such injustices for decades. A multi-racial organization founded by poor and homeless women in the early 1990s, KWRU organized welfare recipients, homeless individuals and families, and other poor people around economic human rights. Six of its members were arrested in 1992 for entering an abandoned building. Their stated intention was to turn it into a community center and KWRU used this moment as an opportunity to call city-wide attention to the growing problem of poverty and homelessness in the land of plenty.

The United States has been in the midst of an affordable housing crisis, hastened by the foreclosure crisis of the Great Recession, for nearly 50 years. Rather than providing a safety net for those who have fallen through the gaps created by this crisis, the Department of Housing and Urban

Development (HUD) has contributed to it. Major budget cuts have led the Department to offer 10,000 fewer units of subsidized housing each year since the 1970s, according to a 2013 report by the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. The affordable housing stock has actually declined by 60 percent since 2010.

Today, only about one in four of those eligible to receive federal housing assistance actually do so. At the same time, the percentage of renter households that spend at least half their income on housing has grown from 21 percent to 30 percent in the past two decades. Meanwhile, nearly 73 percent of mortgage interest deduction subsidies have flowed to the top 20 percent of Americans as measured by income, while the bottom 20 percent have received only 0.1 percent of those same subsidies. The new tax law lowered the cap on deductible mortgage debt, but only slightly, from $1 million to $750,000.

As the demand for rental units has increased, so too has rent itself. Such increases, part of a decades-long trend, have given rise to dire straits for poor and low-income families. In 2016, there was no state or county in the nation where an individual earning the federal minimum wage of $7.25 an hour could afford a two-bedroom apartment at market rent. In fact, the average minimum wage necessary to afford even a one-bedroom unit was $16.35 an hour in 2016. Just one year later that wage has climbed to $17.14, more than double the current federal minimum wage. As of 2017, for every 100 extremely low-income renters, a mere 35 will find affordable rental housing.

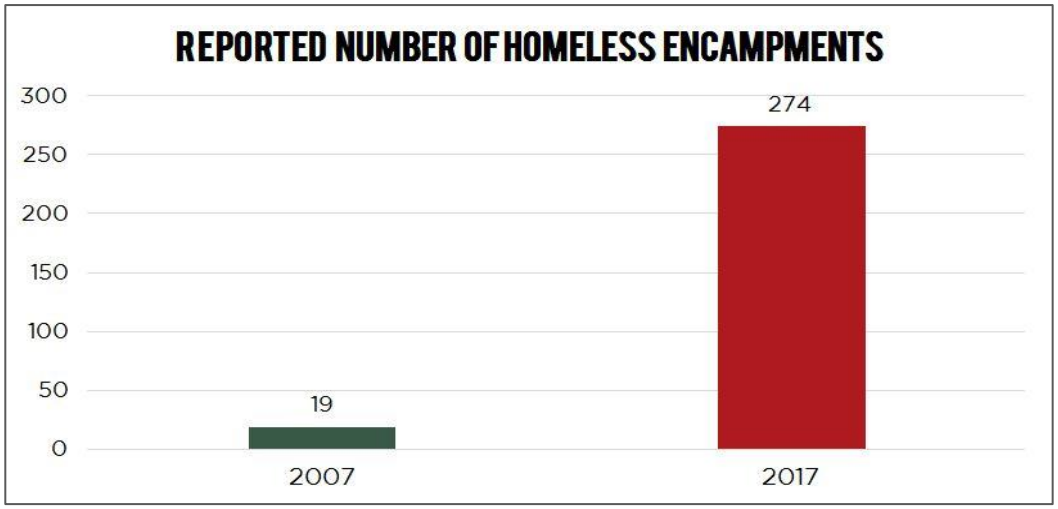
The confluence of these factors has given rise to a housing crisis in the United States. The Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) has been organizing with and among the homeless in California, Washington, Oregon, and Colorado since 2005. Paul Boden, WRAP's Executive Director, who was formerly homeless himself, describes the rise of structural homelessness in the 1980s: "In the 1970s, we started to lose subsidized housing units and that meant losing access to housing in the neighborhoods where those units were. There was a direct connection between the people that were living in subsidized housing, the massive cuts to affordable housing, and the need to open emergency shelter programs…And then we also saw a new category of poor people—homeless poor people—who were somehow seen as different from all the other poor people. But the only difference between homeless poor people and housed poor people is that one is indoors and one is outdoors."

According to the latest figures from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, over 553,000 individuals experienced homelessness each night in 2017. The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP) found that anywhere between 2.5 million and 3.5 million individuals comprise the "sheltered" homeless population in the U.S. every year. This includes those living in shelters, transitional housing centers, and makeshift outdoor shelters, such as clustered encampments colloquially referred to as "tent cities." More than 7.4 million additional individuals were estimated to be on the brink of homelessness, having lost their own homes and transitioned into the homes of others.

One of the most disturbing findings of the NLCHP survey is that the number of reported outdoor encampments increased by 1,342 percent, from 19 to 274 between 2007 and 2016, as Figure 2.15

shows. Underscoring this point, almost two-thirds of the encampments studied were expected to have been in use for more than a year. Over one-fourth were expected to have been in use for more than five years.

Figure 2.15



Source: National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, Tent City, USA.

Historically marginalized populations tend to be disproportionately represented among the homeless, who are a marginalized population themselves. Black people make up 41 percent of the national homeless population (224,937 individuals), despite comprising only about 13 percent of the U.S. population. According to the most recent data from HUD, White people comprise 61.3 percent of the national population and 47 percent (260,979 individuals) of the national homeless population. Similarly, Latinx people are just under 18 percent of the national population, but comprise 22 percent (119,419 individuals) of the national homeless population.[i]

Homelessness is typically conceptualized in the popular imagination as an issue that most directly affects adults, but children are increasingly being forced to reckon with the challenges of homelessness on their own. The majority of homeless families are headed by single women with young children and almost 41,000 unaccompanied children and youth experienced homelessness in 2017, with 88 percent of them falling between the ages of 18 and 24. Troublingly, this group of young people was more likely to be without shelter than other homeless individuals.

Perhaps nowhere is the problem of youth homelessness more salient, and more understudied, than among LGBTQ youth. A 2012 study from the Williams Institute of the UCLA School of Law among homeless youth service providers found that LGBTQ youth made up 40 percent of their clientele. Recent figures estimate that LGBTQ youth represent between five and ten percent of the nation's young people, but anywhere between 20 percent and 40 percent of the national homeless youth

population, according to analysis from the National Coalition for the Homeless. Although the data is limited, some studies have shown that homeless LGBTQ youth are disproportionately youth of color.

The National Center for Transgender Equality's 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey determined that 30 percent of respondents reported being homeless at least once in their lifetimes. Twelve percent cited being transgender as the reason for their homelessness. Half of undocumented transgender respondents expressed that they had been homeless at least once in their lives. Not surprisingly, economic factors played a role. Overall, the poverty rate for transgender respondents in 2015 was 29 percent and their reported unemployment rate was 15 percent. Among Whites, 24 percent of transgender respondents lived in poverty in 2015, but transgender respondents of color were especially hard hit. Thirty-eight percent of Black respondents, 43 percent of Latinx respondents, and 41 percent of Native American respondents indicated that they lived in poverty.

Compounding the vulnerabilities of experiencing homelessness, cities and law enforcement are colluding to criminalize homeless Americans, trying to make the best of the limited resources available to them. A 2016 report from the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty revealed the extent of such criminalization. Of the 187 cities surveyed, 34 percent ban camping in public, 57 percent ban camping in certain public places, 65 percent ban loitering in certain public places, and 53 percent ban sitting or lying down in particular public places, among other behaviors necessary for the homeless to survive on the streets.

These bans are increasing in prevalence in recent years: in the last ten years, for example, bans on camping in public places have increased by 60 percent. Deprived of these makeshift living arrangements, homeless Americans often have few other alternatives. Only five of the 187 cities surveyed by the Law Center had a requirement for contingency plans to provide housing to those who had their "tent cities" disrupted by law enforcement. More disturbingly still, these prohibitions, and the subsequent enforcement of these prohibitions by law enforcement officials, put homeless individuals at risk of incurring criminal records and ensuing criminal justice debt that enmeshes them in the criminal justice system and only deepens their poverty. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, homeless Americans are as much as 11 times more vulnerable to incarceration than the general population nationally.

Section VII: The Criminalization of Poverty

Debtors' prisons were outlawed in the U.S. in 1833 under federal law. In 1983, the U.S. Supreme Court reaffirmed that incarcerating indigent people because of their debts is a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause. However, the reality today is that low-income and poor people are routinely fined or arrested for minor violations, such as failing to use a turn signal at an intersection or driving with a broken taillight or with a suspended license. Policies that criminalize the very condition of being poor have risen since the 2007 financial crisis. Fines rose across 48 states in the wake of the Great Recession, and with them, the fees imposed for late or partial payment, creating a snare for those without sufficient funds. According to the most recent estimates from 2011,

over $50 billion in criminal justice debt was owed by the estimated 10 million Americans that interact with the criminal justice system each year.

Police forces have become money collectors, targeting the poor. The Department of Justice report on Ferguson, Missouri, in 2015 found that the police culture seemed to see low-income residents, especially from Black neighborhoods, "less as constituents to be protected than as potential offenders and sources of revenue." A National Public Radio investigation of Ferguson, in the wake of the Michael Brown killing, found that the municipality collected $2.6 million in fines and fees, largely for municipal code violations, and that this was Ferguson's second-largest source of income. This reality is repeated in low-income municipalities across the U.S. Local governments try to make up for income lost by austerity measures that begin at the federal level and have ramifications for revenue down through the states and localities.

Indeed, the entire criminal justice system is complicit in this scheme. The probation process has become one of the most reliable money makers. In the absence of lost revenue in the wake of the Great Recession, local governments and courts have increasingly turned to private probation companies. These private companies promise to make money overseeing probation operations for local governments and courts at no cost to taxpayers. Instead, the costs of probationary operations are pushed onto the probationers themselves, giving rise to what has become known as the "offender-funded" probation model. The result of such collusion is that the primary objective for local government and courts becomes extracting revenue rather than administering justice. Local governments, courts and private probation companies all profit wildly.

In effect, two criminal justice systems have been created: one for the favored wealthy and one for the poor. Perhaps nowhere is the existence of this two-tier system more apparent than in the practice of determining bail. Originally conceptualized as an incentive for defenders to return for their court appearances, bail has become yet another means of criminalizing poverty. By the Department of Justice's own admission 95 percent of the growth in the incarcerated population since 2000 is the result of an increase in the number of unconvicted defendants, many of whom are unable to make bail. That an increasing number of defendants cannot make bail is a result of the fact that bail amounts

Confronting Homelessness and Incarceration in Rural Washington

Chaplains on the Harbor (COH) is a ministry in Grays Harbor County, a predominantly White county that is one of the most economically distressed in Washington State. COH pastors, organizes, and works with the poor on the streets and in the jails of Grays Harbor. This has brought them unwanted attention and violence from the police and vigilante groups across the county. Aaron Scott, chaplain and organizer with COH, describes their members' relationship with law enforcement: "This region has invested far more heavily in incarceration and policing than in healing. Since the timber industry packed up and left town in the 1990s, the main replacement industry has been incarceration. It starts early, too: Grays Harbor County incarcerates children for nonviolent, non-criminal offenses at a higher rate than any other county in the state of Washington. The ACLU recently sued our juvenile detention facility for torturing a child. Why invest in children, or in healing and recovery, when there's money to be made in keeping the jails full?"

themselves have increased over the years. Studies have also shown that defendants of color are given higher bail amounts than their White counterparts.

If one is jailed for inability to pay bail, not only do costs mount, but jobs are lost, rent and car payments are not made, parents cannot care for their children or keep the lights on in the home. Sometimes this can result in loss of custody of children. Pretrial incarceration can lead to a loss of access to public benefits, including Social Security and Medicaid. One study revealed a positive correlation between pretrial incarceration and a conviction. An inability to make bail can separate defendants from their medications and medical treatments and generally cause a deterioration of a defendant's health. In 2013, individuals who were jailed before their trial made up three-fourths of the total number of suicides by incarcerated persons in local jails.

A NATION THAT CONTINUES YEAR AFTER YEAR TO SPEND MORE MONEY ON MILITARY DEFENSE THAN ON PROGRAMS OF SOCIAL UPLIFT IS APPROACHING SPIRITUAL DEATH.

- THE REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., RIVERSIDE CHURCH, NEW YORK CITY, APRIL 4, 1967

THE WAR ECONOMY & MILITARISM

FIGHTING MILITARISM MEANS NOT JUST STOPPING ONE WAR, BUT TAKING ON THE UNDERLYING SOCIAL STRUCTURES OF RACISM, POVERTY, AND POLICIES THAT ENABLED THE IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN WARS TO CONTINUE, WHILE POLITICIANS AND DEFENSE CONTRACTORS GET RICH, [AND TO SEE] THE MILITARISM IN OUR POLICE. THE MILITARISM OF OUR PUBLIC LANDS. THE MILITARISM OF THE BORDERS. THE MILITARISM IN OUR SCHOOLS. AND VIRTUALLY ALL OF OUR INSTITUTIONS.

- REV. SHAWNA FOSTER, FORMER BOARD CHAIR, IRAQ VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, 2017

When Dr. King warned of the dangers of militarism, the United States was in the middle of a devastating war in Vietnam, with U.S. bombing campaigns ravaging neighboring Cambodia and Laos. And in the five decades since, powerful elites in the United States have never wavered from their conviction that "hard power"—meaning brutal military force—is the basic foundation of U.S. wealth and domination around the world and that non-military engagement with the world, such as diplomacy, can be largely sidelined in favor of military assault.

Today, U.S. troops and bombers are fighting wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, and U.S. drones and planes are conducting deadly bombing campaigns in Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen. In 2017, U.S. Special Forces were deployed in 149 countries.

And yet with no legal draft and fewer Americans serving in the military, the direct costs of U.S. militarism are not as evident as they were in 1968. And the indirect costs of our bloated Pentagon budget and the human and environmental tolls both at home and abroad are woefully under-reported. Unlike President Dwight Eisenhower, who warned against the "military-industrial complex," no contemporary political leader is putting the dangers of militarism and the war economy at the center of public debate.

It is not, therefore, surprising that in the 50 years since Vietnam, U.S. public support for the military has skyrocketed. In a January 2018 poll, 87 percent of American voters said they have "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in the military. No other institution, from schools to banks to courts to the media, let alone Congress, the presidency or political parties, enjoys that level of support. The military is now the most trusted institution in the country.

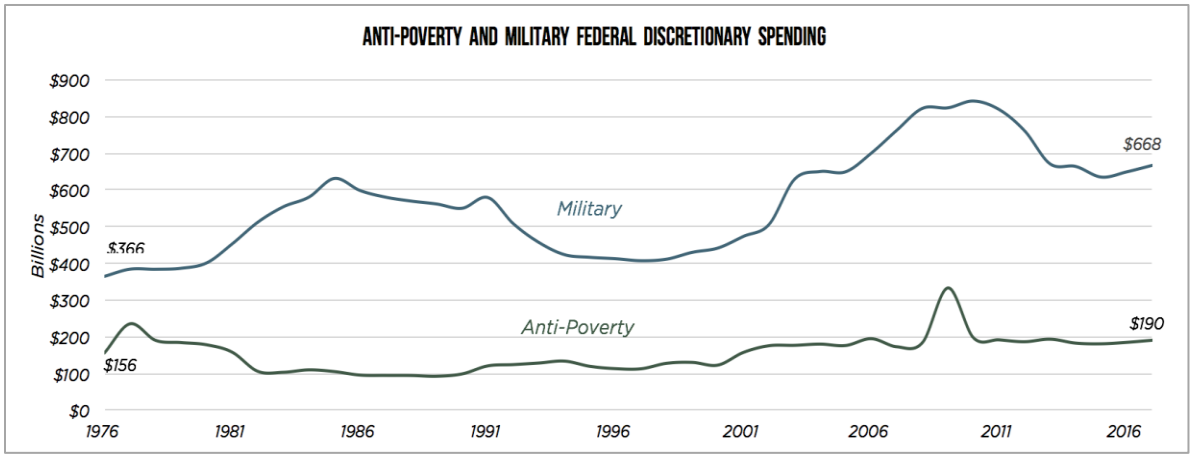
This section highlights under-publicized indicators of the war economy and militarism today, including the human toll of warfare, the budget, privatization, race, gender, and environmental impact.

Section I: The War Economy and Military Expansion

If the priorities of a nation are evident in its budget, our country has been off course for half a century. At the height of the Vietnam War more than 40 years ago, the U.S. was spending more than twice as much of its discretionary budget on the military ($365 billion) as on programs that reduce or prevent poverty ($156 billion). Today the gap between military and anti-poverty discretionary spending has grown far past this.

By 2017, with the Vietnam War long over, the Cold War consigned to history and 15 years into the Global War on Terror, military spending was more than three times the investment in people's lives at home—$668 billion for the military versus $190 billion for education, jobs, housing and other basic human needs. (All figures are adjusted for inflation.)

Figure 3.1



Source: National Priorities Project, Office of Management and Budget. Military spending includes spending on the Department of Defense, wars, nuclear weapons, and other military activities. Anti-poverty spending was broadly defined to include: federal education spending (K-12 and higher education); Medicare (administration and some program parts); community and regional development; housing assistance; early childhood education; community social services; income security (supplemental income, heating assistance, child care block grants, etc.); training and employment services; and unemployment assistance.

Overall, in 1976, the United States spent 51¢ of every discretionary dollar on the military, and 22¢ on anti-poverty programs. In 2017, this figure was 53¢ going to the military, and just 15¢ going to anti-poverty programs. Under the budget President Trump proposed in February 2018, almost two-thirds—65¢ of every discretionary dollar—would go to the military, and just 12¢ would go to anti-poverty programs by 2023.

Many argue that the military produces jobs, making the enormous expenditure an investment in people's lives. They note that the rise of the World War II-era military production helped pull the country out of the Great Depression. But by today's standards, since the beginning of the War on Terror, military spending tends to stall job creation as compared to most other ways of investing federal dollars. The latest research finds that $1 billion in military spending creates approximately 11,200 jobs—but the same amount of money would create 26,700 jobs if invested in education, 16,800 jobs in clean energy, or 17,200 in health care.

Author David Vine on U.S. Military Bases

"In 1968, at the height of the war in Vietnam, the United States had military bases in about 50 countries. 50 years later, there are about 800 U.S. overseas bases in at least 80 countries. Special Forces Command acknowledges that in 2017 its elite troops were operating in at least 149 countries.

While we spend around $150 billion a year maintaining comfortable bases and troops in Italy, Okinawa, Germany, and beyond, the water in Flint is still unsafe to drink, the subway systems in Washington, D.C. and New York City still suffer frequent, sometimes deadly accidents, and schools in Baltimore still don't have enough heat to remain open on cold winter days."

David Vine, American University, author of Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World.

Figure 3.2

Investigative reporter Nick Turse revealed that, according to U.S. Special Operations Command the Pentagon's elite troops, including Navy SEALS and Army Green Berets, were deployed to 149 nations in 2017. The map shows 132 of those countries; 129 locations (in blue) were supplied by U.S. Special Operations Command; Turse identified 3 additional locations (in red) -- Syria, Yemen, and Somalia -- from open-source information. The other 17 countries have not been identified.

The expansion of the U.S. military around the world causes serious problems, from assaults on local women to environmental destruction to distorting local economies. According to *Stars and Stripes*, in 2011 there were 333 reports of sexual assault by U.S. Marines on Marine bases. The highest number was at the huge Camp Lejeune base in Florida and the second highest, with 67 assaults, was Okinawa.

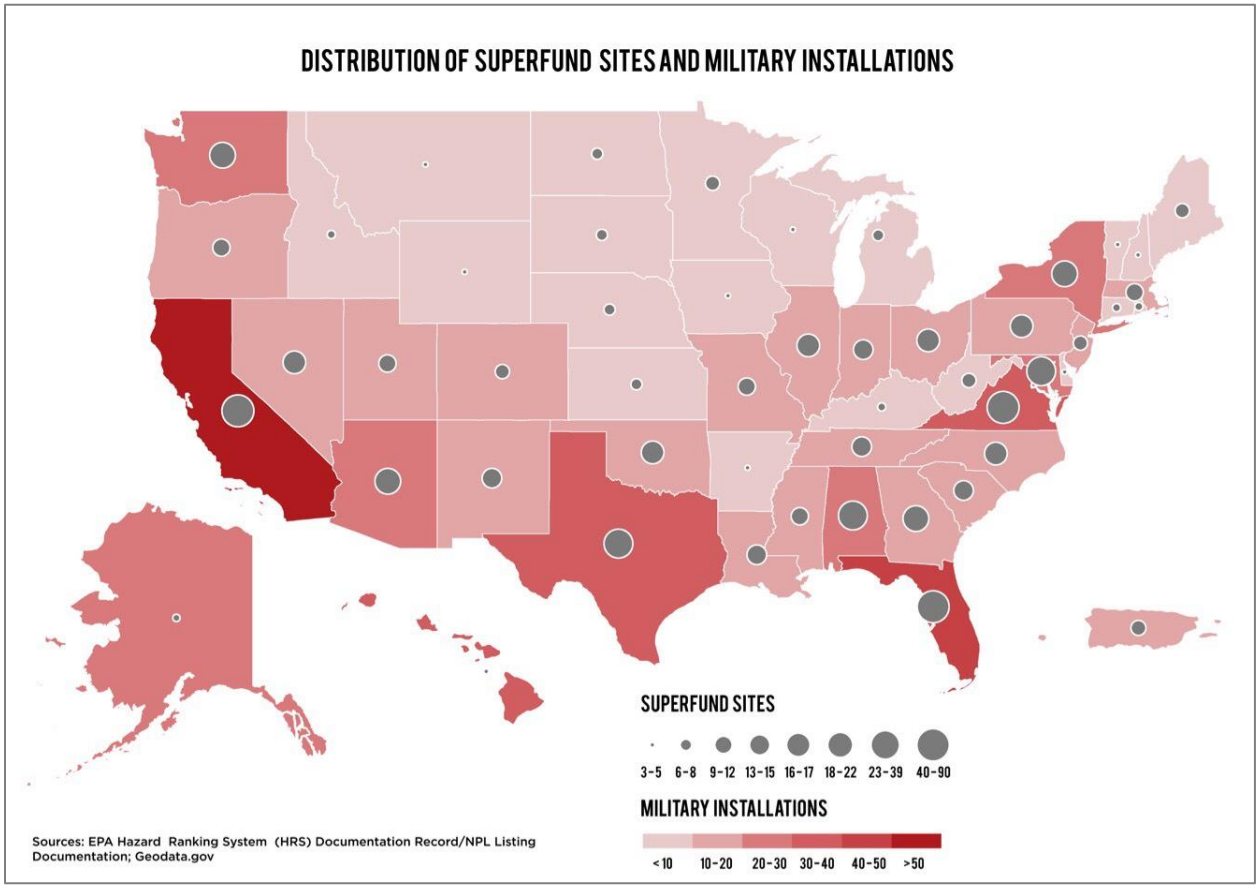
Along with people, the local environment always suffers. As Vine writes in *Base Nation*, "there is no underestimating the profound environmental damage caused by most military bases and the significant risks they pose to human and the rest of the natural environment...Even the greenest military installation has a carbon footprint vastly disproportionate to the number of people living

and working on base. Bases are, after all, usually home to large concentrations of extraordinarily fuel-inefficient trucks, tanks, aircraft, and naval vessels...The military also uses huge amounts of energy to air-condition, heat, and power its bases' tens of thousands of buildings and structures. The military's thirst for petroleum is so great that on a worldwide basis, the U.S. armed services consume more oil every day than the entire country of Sweden."

The environmental legacy of U.S. wars around the world include: unexploded ordnance left behind by U.S. troops, forests destroyed by chemical defoliants such as Agent Orange in Vietnam, toxic liquids that leach into the soil and water of war-ravaged countries for generations after wars have ended, and air pollution from military burn pits used to destroy chemicals, plastics, equipment, and documents.

This environmental impact is evident at home, as well. According to a 2014 exposé in *Newsweek* looking just at military bases inside the U.S., the Pentagon is directly responsible for 141 Superfund sites, which are contaminated sites so dangerous to human health or the environment that they qualify for special federal clean-up grants. This amounts to 10 percent of all of Superfund sites, far more than any other polluter. Another 760 or so additional Superfund sites are abandoned military facilities or sites that otherwise support military needs.

Figure 3.3



Section II: Benefitting From War And Privatizing The Military

Whether 50 years ago, when the first Poor People's Campaign called out excessive military spending, or today, the massive U.S. defense budget has never actually been about "defense." Washington's wars of the last 50 years have little to do with protecting Americans. Rather, their goals are to consolidate U.S. corporations' control over oil, gas, other resources and pipelines; to supply the Pentagon with military bases and strategic territory to wage more wars; to maintain military dominance over any challenger(s); and to continue to provide justification for Washington's multi-billion dollar military industry.

That industry is thriving. In 1967, the year the first Poor People's Campaign was announced and the height of the Vietnam War, the Pentagon spent $251 billion on military contractors. 50 years later, in 2017, that amount had increased to $320 billion. Just as one example, in 2017 Pentagon contractor Lockheed Martin was paid over $35 billion in taxpayer money, almost as much as the $39 billion Trump proposed for the entire State Department budget for 2019.

Huge profits for military contractors and their exceptionally highly paid CEOs undercut the common claim that "no one *wants* war." When your personal wealth relies directly on military spending, there is a motive to support pro-war policies. In the years following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, virtually all corporate CEOs were doing very well. A 2005 report by the Institute for Policy Studies showed that between 2001 and 2004, CEOs of large corporations averaged a 7 percent raise on their already lucrative salaries. Defense contractor CEOs, however, averaged a 200 percent increase in compensation as the U.S. ramped up war in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The problem goes beyond the false claims that the hundreds of billions of dollars in the U.S. military budget are somehow all necessary to protect our troops. The Pentagon, the White House, Congressional armed services committees, and military contractors all rely on public support for the troops to justify military spending that actually has nothing to do with protecting or supporting soldiers. In fact, they do a kind of "bait and switch" to justify spending on nuclear weapons, high-tech advanced weapons systems, and new warplanes that sometimes even the Pentagon itself does not want. In the meantime, there are cost overruns, and hundreds of billions every year go straight from Pentagon procurement offices to giant corporations. None of that goes to the troops.

War Profiteering: The David Brooks Story

In 2005, David H. Brooks threw a party for his daughter's bat mitzvah that was absurdly over the top. The New York businessman flew in musical mega stars Stephen Tyler and Joe Perry (from Aerosmith), 50 Cent, Tom Petty, Kenny G., and a gaggle of other celebrity acts, many by private jet, to perform for the girl in the Rainbow Room in Rockefeller Center. That the money for the bash, estimated by the New York Daily News at $10 million, came from war profits, made this excess even more obscene.

Brooks, CEO of bulletproof vest maker DHB Industries, had seen his fortunes soar since the 9-11 terrorist attacks. In 2004, he earned $70 million, most of it from stock options. That represented an increase of 13,349 percent over his pre-9-11 compensation, according to Executive Excess, co-published by the Institute for Policy Studies and United for a Fair Economy.

Brooks' flaunting of his war wealth drew attention to the fact that the equipment which boosted his fortunes didn't even work very well. In May 2005, the Marines recalled more than 5,000 DHB armored vests after questions were raised about their effectiveness in stopping 9 mm bullets. The Marines and Army later announced a recall of an additional 18,000 DHB vests.

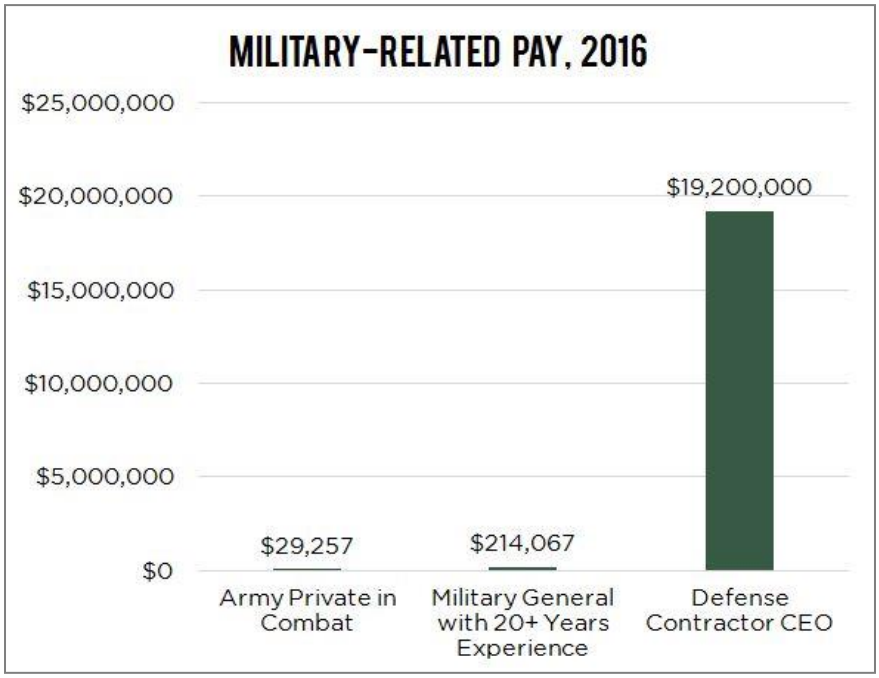
While many war profiteers and fraudsters get off scot free, Brooks's outrageous personal behavior drew enough scrutiny to land him in prison in 2010 for insider trading and using company funds for his own lavish lifestyle. He died in prison in 2016.

Drawn from "Executive Excess: Close Loopholes That Allow War Profiteering" by Sarah Anderson, Institute for Policy Studies, 2006.

In 2016, the CEOs of the top five defense contractors earned a combined total of $96 million in compensation, or an average of $19.2 million. That is more than 90 times the $214,000 earned by a

U.S. military general with 20 years of experience that same year, including housing allowances and extra combat pay. Army privates in combat, for their part, faced considerably more everyday risk than CEOs—or generals for that matter. Yet they earned less than $30,000 in 2016.

Figure 3.4

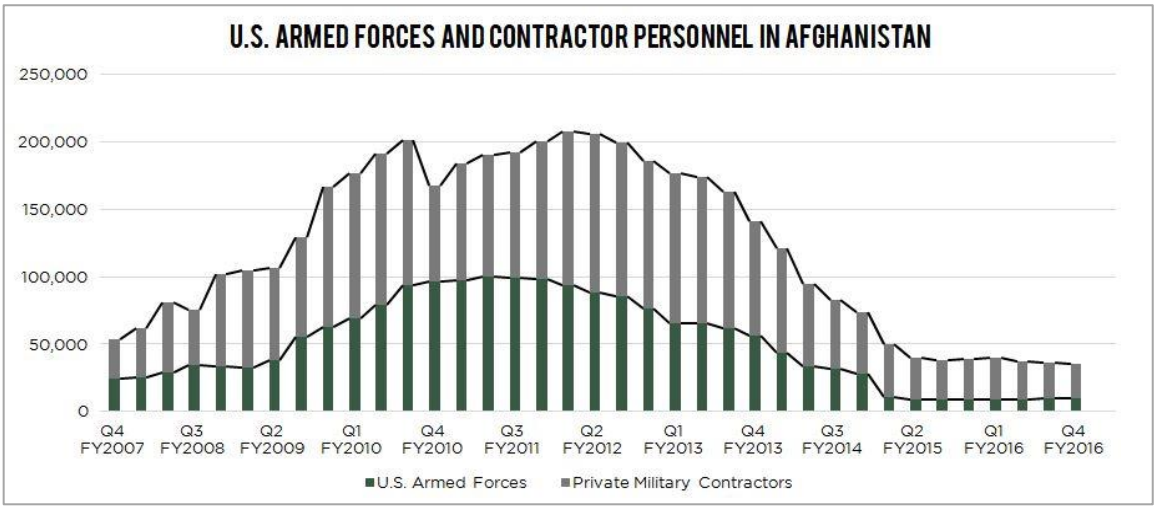


Source: Institute for Policy Studies, based on Defense Finance and Accounting Service and corporate proxy statements.

The availability of private military contractors, along with the end of the draft and the changing nature of warfare, has also led to a dramatic shift towards reliance on privately employed civilian workers to do many of the tasks once assigned to lower-ranked troops. As of January 2018, the Pentagon's job categories for private contractors in the Iraq and Afghanistan war theaters include activities like construction, base support (e.g., cooking and cleaning), IT/communications, medical and dental, social services, translation and interpretation, and transportation—as well as armed and unarmed security details. These are many of the same responsibilities active duty military service members also provide but for far less compensation.

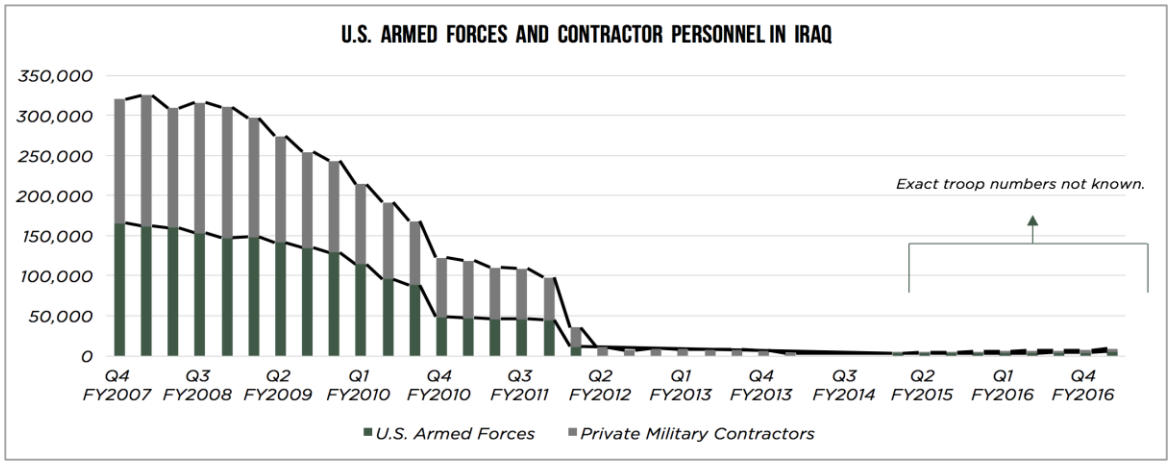
Further, during the Vietnam War 50 years ago, the ratio of U.S. soldiers to civilian contractors was 1 to 0.17. In the early Afghanistan and Iraq Wars, the numbers shot up almost 10 times higher—1.1 contractors for every soldier in Afghanistan, and 1.2 in Iraq. By 2016, at the height of the drone wars, Foreign Policy magazine reported that "Obama has authorized the continuation or re-emergence of two of the most contractor-dependent wars (or 'overseas contingency operations' in Pentagon-speak) in U.S. history. As noted previously, there are roughly three contractor personnel (28,626) for every member of the U.S. military (9,800) in Afghanistan, far above the contractor per uniformed military personnel average of America's previous wars. In Iraq today, 7,773 contractors support U.S. government operations—and 4,087 U.S. troops."

Figure 3.5



Source: Congressional Research Service, Department of Defense Contractor and Troop Levels in Iraq and Afghanistan, 2007-2017. "Private Military Contractors" refers to both security and non-security contractors. DOD did not begin releasing data on contractors in CENTCOM until Q4 FY2007. U.S. Armed Forces personnel figures include all active and reserve component personnel.

Figure 3.6



Source: Congressional Research Service, Department of Defense Contractor and Troop Levels in Iraq and Afghanistan, 2007-2017. "Private Military Contractors" refers to both security and non-security contractors. DOD did not begin releasing data on contractors in CENTCOM until Q4 FY2007. U.S. Armed Forces personnel figures include all active and reserve component personnel.

The deployment of so many civilian contractors creates all kinds of problems. Military contractors are even less accountable than soldiers to the rules of engagement or international laws of war regarding protection of civilians. When four machine gun-wielding civilian operatives employed by Blackwater under a Pentagon contract carried out the Nisour Square massacre in Iraq in 2007, killing 17 unarmed Iraqi civilians, Blackwater became the poster child for what the *Washington Post* called

"deep resentments about the accountability of American security forces during one of the bloodiest periods of the Iraq War." Massive publicity led to a rare prosecution of the Blackwater mercenaries in a U.S. court, leading to a first-degree murder conviction and three other thirty-year sentences in 2014. Three years later the verdicts and sentences were overturned.

Reliance on contractors also means the public is frequently misled into believing that wars are winding down because official troop levels are dropping, unaware of the vast numbers of civilians still doing the Pentagon's fighting. And the pay disparity between well-paid U.S. private contractors and their military counterparts can create resentment among U.S. troops paid so little that they and their families often qualify for food stamps. In 2016 the Government Accounting Office reported that in 2013 about 23,000 active duty military troops were receiving food stamps. The same GAO report showed that in 2015, 24 percent of children in Pentagon-run U.S. schools qualified for free meals, and another 21 percent qualified for reduced-price meals.

Section III: The Poverty Draft

Many people continue to see the military as a way out of poverty. The ranks of the so-called "all-volunteer military" are still filled by a draft—not a legal draft, as during the Vietnam War, but an economic draft. During the heyday of the Vietnam-era draft, many middle class and wealthy young men were able to defer or avoid military service through access to lawyers, doctors, universities, and other institutions inaccessible to the poor. Today, young men and women are still subject to a draft enforced by poverty, by lack of other jobs, by lack of college opportunities, and by the limited options available in rural areas and small towns.

As reported in a 2008 study on race, class, immigration status, and military service, “an important predictor to military service in the general population is family income. Those with lower family income are more likely to join the military than those with higher family income...the all-volunteer force continues to see overrepresentation of the working and middle classes, with fewer incentives for upper class participation.”

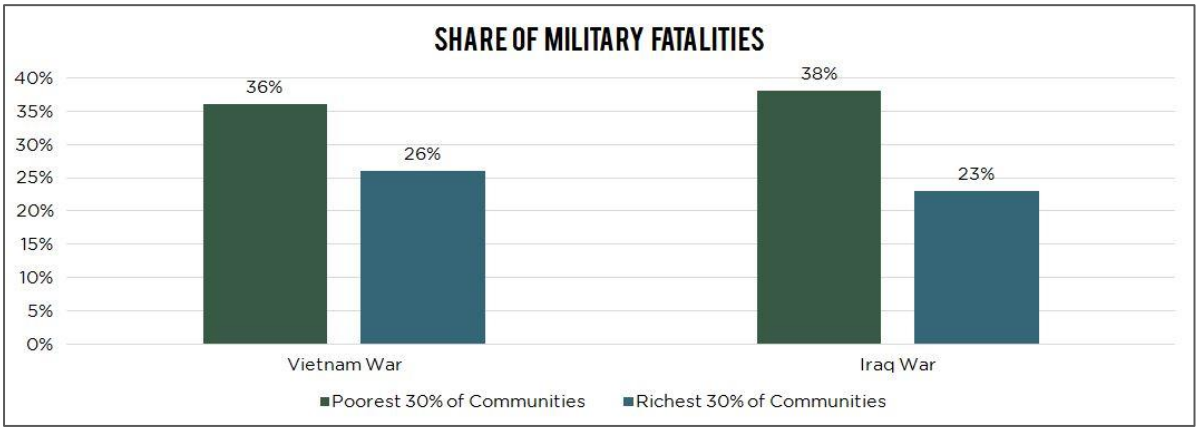
This has meant that, over the last 50 years, poor communities continue to suffer a disproportionate share of the nation's wartime fatalities. The poorest 30 percent of U.S. communities suffered 36 percent of the casualties in the Vietnam War and 38 percent in the Iraq War. The wealthiest 30 percent of U.S. communities had 26 percent of casualties in the Vietnam War and only 23 percent in the Iraq War.

Veterans doing an "About Face" Against War

About Face: Veterans Against the War is the new name of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), an organization of veterans and active duty servicemen and women from all branches of military service, National Guard members, and reservists who have served in the U.S. military since September 11, 2001. Founded in 2004, IVAW has led the movement of veterans and GIs working to end the U.S. military's occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. IVAW has built up a grassroots base of over 3,000 members in 48 states across the country. In 2008, they organized Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan, an event that built on the first Winter Soldier hearings organized by Vietnam Veterans Against the War in 1971. Thirty-seven years later, they brought out more than 200 veterans to talk about their experiences in the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Members also organized a protest against NATO in 2012 in Chicago, where veterans, also building on Vietnam Veterans Against the War's action decades earlier, threw back their medals of honor in protest against the lies and the impacts of war at home and abroad.

Rev. Shawna Foster was Board Chair of About Face: Veterans Against the War until 2017 and speaks to the impact of the privatization of the military: "We watched our jobs being taken away by contractors who would do the exact same job we were paid to do, except we were getting paid under minimum wage...and [contractors] were making $90,000-$120,000 a year. So we would quit and come back as contractors, but the thing is, if you die as a contractor doing the same job, you don't get the same benefits like you do in the military...and nobody cares. Nobody is throwing a parade, nobody is remembering you anywhere, nobody is naming a street after you. But if you die in the service, that is totally different. You come back in a coffin, with a flag draped over you...this is one way the war machine has been able to continue at our expense."

Figure 3.7



Source: Douglas L. Kriner and Francis X. Shen, Los Angeles Times

In 2010, the Iraq war was still at its height and the massive job losses of the 2007-08 financial crisis had kicked in. The crisis affected everyone, but according to the National Priorities Project, "recruitment rates [were] about 20 percent higher in non-metropolitan counties than they [were] in metropolitan counties." More recently, a 2017 study based on Pentagon information on the hometowns of 6,800 U.S. casualties from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan through 2016 indicated

that 23 percent of the casualties came from small towns and rural areas that together make up only 17 percent of the U.S. population.

Too often veterans drafted by poverty and treated badly in the military continue to face economic hardship when they return. According to a 2017 report from the Economic Policy Institute, if the federal minimum wage were increased to $15 per hour by 2024, as some new legislation proposes, one out of every five vets (1.8 million people) would get a raise. And the high number of veterans who are currently underpaid undercuts the myth that only teenagers working at McDonald's after school would benefit from raising the minimum wage. Of the military veterans who would benefit, nearly two-thirds are 40 years old or older. More than 60 percent have some college, and almost 70 percent are working full time at below living wage levels.

The Poverty Draft in Cities and Small Towns

Jose Vasquez, Current Board Chair of About Face: Veterans Against the War, grew up in the Bronx, New York, and then moved to San Bernardino, California. Garett Rappenhagen grew up in Colorado and served as a Cavalry Scout Sniper with the 1st Infantry Division in the U.S. Army. He is the Regional Director of the Vet Voice Foundation. Both Jose and Garett were conscripted into the military through the poverty draft, seeking opportunities through military service that were not readily available otherwise. They also both left the service to join the veterans' resistance movement.

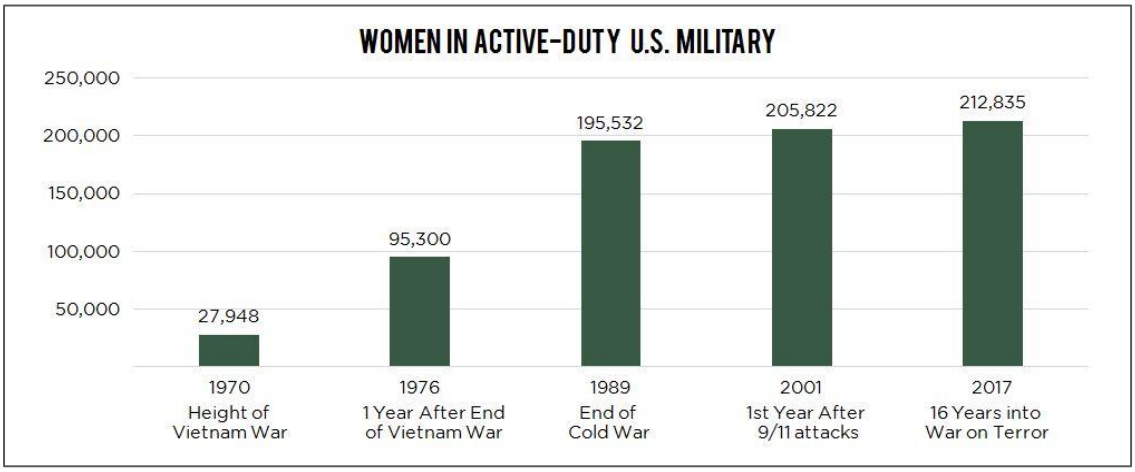
As Jose describes: "The high school I went to in San Bernardino was near a large Air Force base. When that Air Force base closed, the economy of San Bernardino was devastated…a lot of folks moved there from L.A. because it was cheaper, but it also brought with it poverty, drugs, gang violence. I grew up on welfare. My mom was a single mom with four kids. For me joining the military was my escape and way out of that situation I was in...When I signed up as a 16-year-old high school kid, my recruiter talked about $40,000 for college…I thought this was a stepping stone. I wasn't necessarily thinking of the military as a career but this was a way out, with the GI Bill and the prestige and honor having served in the military. I had a vague sense that employers would like the fact that I was a veteran. And it got me out of L.A. immediately once I signed up. I would soon after be able to send home money to my mother who was looking after my siblings."

Garett describes his own path to the military: "I dropped out of high school after my father died of Agent Orange-related cancer and ended up working small minimum wage jobs. I bounced around a lot until I decided to join the military one month before September 11th...I was getting in trouble with law enforcement and realized that I didn't have a lot of opportunities for college...I thought through serving in the military, I would get that opportunity...I don't think my situation was that uncommon. Most of the people I talked to were from poor rural areas or from the ghetto somewhere, places with very limited opportunity….[Recruiters are] in our high schools, sometime in our junior high schools, middle schools—recruiting kids all the time. You see them at fairs and other things where you see 8 and 10-year-olds are allowed to pick up weapons at a table and hold them and cock them and feel proud to be holding them."

Section IV: The Military Gender Gap

Only one year before the 1968 Poor People's Campaign, the longstanding U.S. law restricting the share of women in the military to 2 percent of the total force was changed—largely because of the demands of the escalating Vietnam War. The women's movement that began during Vietnam also played a significant part in the increasing number of and broadened roles for women in the U.S. military. The case for women's equality in the U.S. military was complicated by the fact that that same military was engaging in wars that were killing large numbers of women in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

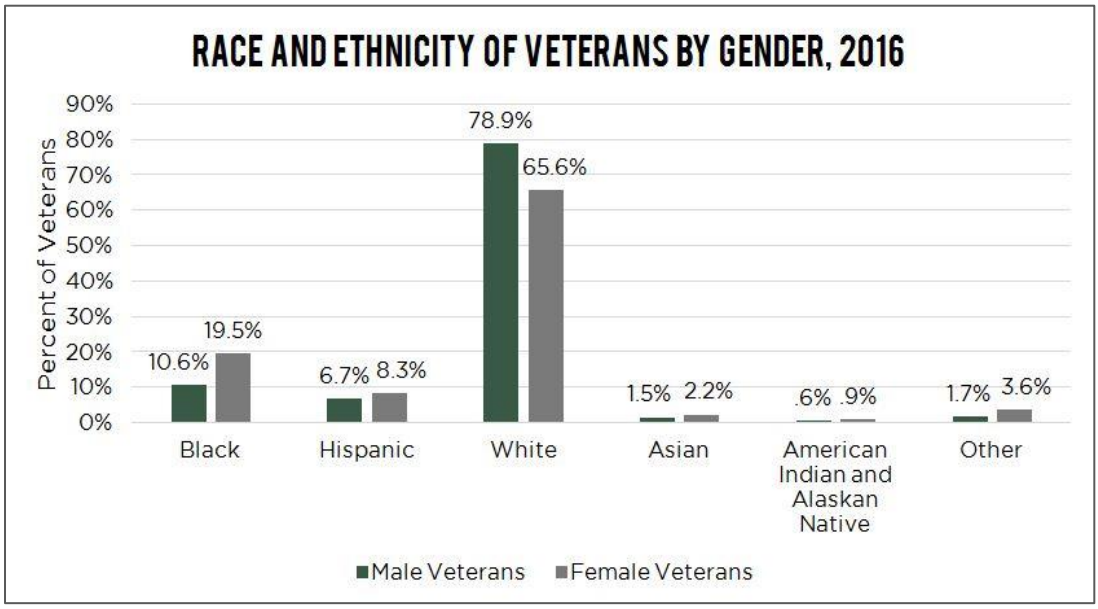
Figure 3.8



Source: Department of Defense.

By the time of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars almost 35 years later, women played a significantly larger role in the military, both in numbers and in range of responsibilities. In 2015, people of color made up 21 percent of the relevant civilian population, while they constituted 30.5 percent of the enlisted troops. Women of color represented higher percentages than men of color in all parts of the military forces. Women veterans, in 2016, were also significantly more diverse racially, with almost twice as high a percentage of Black female veterans as their male counterparts.

Figure 3.9



Source: National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, Profiles of Veterans: 2016.

But as women's participation in the military increased, so did the number of women victimized by their fellow soldiers. According to recent Veterans Administration (VA) data, one in every five women veterans has told their VA healthcare provider that they have experienced military sexual trauma, defined as sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment. In 2012, a Department of Veterans Affairs survey indicated that nearly half of female military personnel sent to Iraq or Afghanistan had reported being sexually harassed, and nearly 25 percent said they had been sexually assaulted.

While consistent historical data are lacking, sexual trauma has long plagued the U.S. military. According to an article in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, a 2003 survey of women veterans who served in wars from Vietnam to the first Gulf war found that nearly 30 percent had suffered from rape or attempted rape and 79 percent reported being sexually harassed.

This institutional discrimination against women soldiers takes place alongside propaganda efforts to use discrimination against women as a justification for war. Just four years before 2001, when the extremist anti-women Taliban ruled Afghanistan, UNOCAL oil adviser Zalmay Khalilzad had welcomed the Taliban to the United States to discuss potential deals. Little or no concern was expressed about women's rights or women's lives. In December 2001 President George W. Bush appointed Khalilzad special representative, and later U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan.

After the September 11 attacks, there was a sudden onslaught of expressed concern about the Taliban's treatment of Afghan women. Just weeks into the U.S. war in Afghanistan, First Lady Laura Bush called the war "a fight for the rights and dignity of women." But the U.S.-installed government that replaced the Taliban included many warlords and others whose extreme antagonism to women's

rights was hardly distinguishable from that of the Taliban. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a U.S. favorite from the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s, actually invented the horrific tactic of throwing acid in the face of young women heading for school; in 2018 he remains influential in Afghan political life. And after more than 16 years of U.S. war and occupation, CIA rankings show Afghanistan's level of infant mortality remains just where it was when the Taliban were in power: the highest in the world.

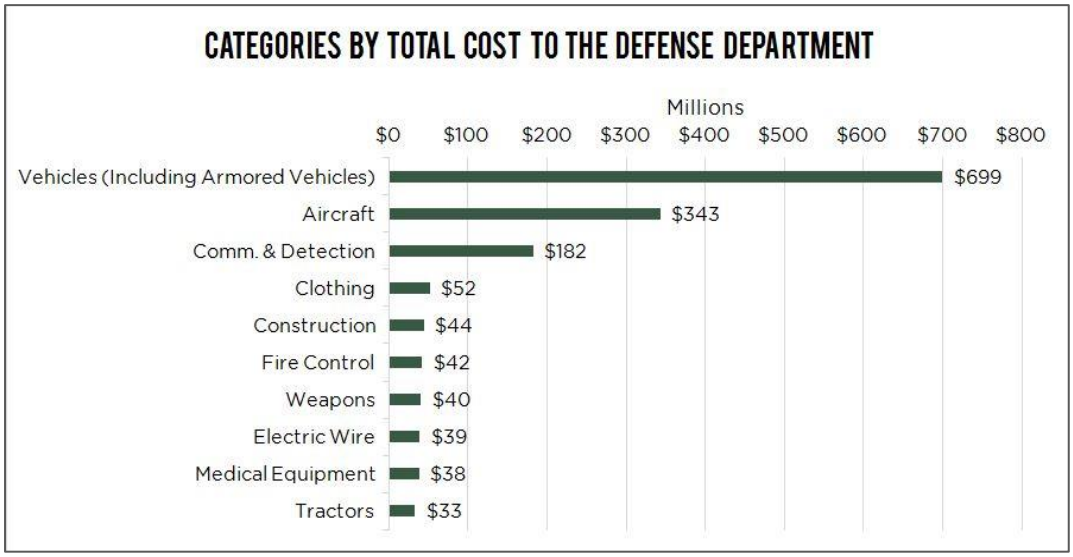
As Afghan women activists Sonali Kolhatkar and Mariam Rawi poignantly assert, "The tired claim that one of the chief objectives of the military occupation of Afghanistan is to liberate Afghan women is not only absurd, it is offensive. Waging war does not lead to the liberation of women anywhere. Women always disproportionately suffer the effects of war, and to think that women's rights can be won with bullets and bloodshed is a position dangerous in its naïveté. ... Paper gains for women's rights mean nothing when, according to the chief justice of the Afghan Supreme Court, the only two rights women are guaranteed by the constitution are the right to obey their husbands and the right to pray, but not in a mosque. These are the convictions of the government the U.S. has helped to create. The American presence in Afghanistan will do nothing to diminish them. Sadly, as horrifying as the status of women in Afghanistan may sound to those of us who live in the West, the biggest problems faced by Afghan women are not related to patriarchy. Their biggest problem is war."

Section V: Militarizing Our Society

The militarization of U.S. society is visible far beyond the Pentagon. Less than three months after Martin Luther King was assassinated, Congress passed the Omnibus Crime and Safe Streets Act, vastly increasing federal funds for local police forces. 50 years later, many U.S. police departments have used those funds to adopt the technology, tactics, and cultural outlook of the armed forces, resulting in highly militarized local police.

Much of the federal funding comes through things like the "1033 program," which authorizes the Pentagon to transfer military equipment and resources to local police departments—from grenade launchers to armored personnel carriers—all at virtually no cost. Between 2006 and 2014 alone, the value of just the top ten categories of military equipment sent to law enforcement agencies totaled more than $1.5 billion. It was because of the 1033 program that an armored military vehicle patrolled the streets of Ferguson after the killing of Michael Brown in 2014.

Figure 3.10



Source: National Public Radio, data obtained from The Law Enforcement Support Office.

Another example was the creation of Special Weapons And Tactical (SWAT) teams in police departments across the country. The American Civil Liberties Union's 2014 report on militarization of local police found that SWAT raids often used unnecessary violence, and were clustered in predominantly Black and Latinx neighborhoods. Overall, law enforcement agencies that received military equipment are associated with greater numbers of civilian killings by police.

The Military, the Police and the War on Drugs

"The military unit that coordinates military support for anti-drug efforts in the continental United States (i.e., Joint Task Force 6) has worked extensively with various American law enforcement agencies but particularly with the U.S. Border Patrol, a police unit focused on immigration issues.

"This collaboration has changed over the years from the military simply providing loans and equipment (in the early 1980s), to providing advisors and training (in the late 1980s), to providing ground troops and substantial integration of military and law enforcement efforts in the 1990s. This collaboration has often entailed serious cultural adjustments, in that law enforcement agencies (LEAs) are supposed to think in terms of legal procedures and due-process rights, while military agencies think in terms of overwhelming and destroying an adversary. Thus, the training (in small-unit tactics, interview and interrogation techniques, the use of pyrotechnics and booby traps, etc.) provided by the military to American LEAs is oriented toward the elimination of an enemy threat and inherently engenders a much more militaristic orientation in civilian police bodies.

"Interestingly, because of the U.S. military's presence in the 'war on drugs' worldwide, this tendency to militarize civilian police forces through collaborative training is not just limited to American LEAs. Researchers have documented that the U.S. military trained almost two thousand Colombian National Police and about one hundred Panamanian National Police in light infantry tactics in 2003. As these investigators have noted, light infantry tactics are not police skills but military skills; and the provision of such training cannot but help blur the line between the police and military roles. Thus, seen in this broader context, it is perhaps not surprising that the U.S. military's role in the global war on narco-trafficking (which has encouraged practices, programs, and doctrines promoting confusion between the police and military roles abroad) has also fostered a similar confusion of roles in the United States itself."

- excerpted from "Soldiers as Police Officers/ Police Officers as Soldiers: Role Evolution and Revolution in the United States," Donald J. Campbell & Kathleen M. Campbell, Armed Forces & Security

Another impact of this widespread militarization at the governmental level—militarized police agencies and the military forces themselves—is the militarization of much of civilian life in the United States. While guns have always played a major role in U.S. history and culture, dating back to the genocide of Native people inherent in the European conquest of the continent and the enslavement of Black Africans, guns are now more prevalent than ever before. With 265 million guns, Americans own far more guns per capita than the residents of any other country. According to the Geneva-based Small Arms Survey, "[c]ivilian ownership of machine guns is legal in most parts of the United States, under Class 3 licenses. The phenomenon is seen in a few other countries, typically with weak legal systems, such as Somalia and Yemen."

The ubiquity of guns exacts a steep price. From 1968 to 2016, there were about 1.6 million gun deaths in the United States. U.S. homicide rates were 7.0 times higher than in other high-income countries, driven by a gun homicide rate that was 25.2 times higher. Of the 38,658 gun deaths in the United States in 2016 alone, almost 40 percent were homicides. Guns killed nearly 2,400 children 18 or under that year.

> "God didn't call America to do what she's doing in the world now. God didn't call America to engage in a senseless, unjust war as the war in Vietnam. And we are criminals in that war. We've committed more war crimes almost than any nation in the world, and I'm going to continue to say it. And we won't stop it because of our pride and our arrogance as a nation."
>
> Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Feb 4, 1968, The Drum Major Instinct

Section VI: The Human and Moral Costs of the Wars— And What Comes After

Today, as in 1968, the Pentagon does not drop bombs on ideas like "terrorism" or "communism." It drops bombs on cities, it kills children and families, nearly all of them people of color, in countries around the world, and puts our own troops in harm's way. The numbers of those civilian casualties continue to rise, despite shifts in amounts and types of U.S. troops and tactics used. According to the United Nations, civilian deaths in Afghanistan reached a record high number during the first nine months of 2017 than during the same period in 2009 when the counting began. The UN found a 52 percent increase in civilian casualties from air strikes compared to the same period in 2016. The UN also expressed particular concern about casualties among women and children caused by air strikes, noting that "women and children comprised more than two-thirds—68 percent—of civilian casualties from aerial attacks."

As to the U.S. war against ISIS, between April 2016 and June 2017, a *New York Times team* conducted the first systematic, ground-based investigation of airstrikes in Iraq since the latest military action in the country began in 2014. They found that the coalition strikes had been much less precise than the military claimed, with deadly results. One in five of the coalition strikes identified resulted in civilian death, a rate more than 31 times that acknowledged by the coalition. According to the report, “In terms of civilian deaths, this may be the least transparent war in recent American history."

A U.S. colonel famously said in Vietnam, “we had to destroy the village in order to save it.” Today, as can be seen in places like Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq, the U.S. military is destroying entire cities, killing thousands, and dispossessing millions, in the name of liberating them from ISIS or other enemies. According to the United Nations, in 2016, 65.6 million people around the world had been forced to flee violence, war, and persecution. Many remained in their home countries, struggling to find safety somewhere, perpetually displaced. Many others sought refuge in other countries. In 2016 there were nearly 22.5 million such international refugees, more than half of them children.

The streams of desperate people seeking refuge across the sea or around the world have become a flood. In the United States more than anywhere else, those people have been met with racist attack, xenophobic rejection, and three Muslim bans. In the first years of the Syrian war, from 2011 to 2014,

the U.S. admitted only 172 Syrian refugees. The numbers went up in 2015-16, but the total for both years was still under 15,000. When the Trump administration came into office and announced a series of Muslim bans, Syrian refugee admissions along with entry of all people from various Muslim-majority countries virtually collapsed.

Refugee flows resulting from U.S. wars are not a new phenomenon—and public opposition to refugees, often rooted in racism and xenophobia, is not new either. But government policy did not always encourage or follow public opposition in the past. After the Vietnam War, a refugee crisis emerged as well. Just days after the end of the war in May 1975, polls showed only 37 percent of Americans supported admitting refugees from Washington's war, while 49 percent opposed. But the U.S. government nevertheless immediately allowed in 130,000 refugees, mainly supporters of the U.S.-backed South Vietnamese government and military. By the end of the decade, with tens of thousands of new Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians on the move seeking refuge, the U.S. began accepting 14,000 every month, twice the earlier limit. Most Americans—62 percent— opposed allowing them in. Despite the public opposition, over the next decade almost 600,000 Southeast Asian refugees were admitted. The job of the U.S. military at that time was to arrange the settlement of the refugees, not to keep them out of the United States.

Resettling Refugees

Col. Ann Wright, a former acting ambassador and State Department official and before that a high-ranking military officer, was in charge of resettlement of Vietnamese refugees in 1975. She is also with Veterans for Peace and CODEPINK Women for Peace. She remembers that, "Just as the war was ending, I was recalled to active duty in the military to oversee one of the three large refugee centers set up at U.S. military bases—Camp Chaffee in Arkansas. We were told to prepare to receive over 300,000 Vietnamese and other Indochinese refugees in just six weeks. (A total of 130,000 arrived during those first weeks.)

"We had a continuous population of 30,000 refugees at Fort Chaffee. We had World War II barracks quickly renovated to house family units. We washed out the old huge mess halls to begin cooking for thousands of people. Tons of rice and tons of cabbage, carrots and onions arrived weekly, and we provided cots, sheets, towels, and baby diapers. There were no laundry facilities big enough for such a volume of laundry in that part of Arkansas, so we sent it by helicopter to Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

"The complicated logistics were done mostly with a clipboard and pencil—no computers yet.
I was in charge of buying winter clothes for the refugees that were remaining in the camps after September. I went to Sears to get catalogs to determine what types of clothes we would get and then attempted to see where we could order them in such huge numbers. The only company that still had enough winter clothes in their inventory was the military post exchange international, which brought clothes back from Europe for us to give to the refugees for the coming winter.

"Some of the most poignant moments were watching older Vietnamese standing at the fences to meet buses coming from the airport, watching everyone get off the buses to see if they could spot family members from whom they had been separated in the massive chaos of the war's end. The job of the U.S. Army at that time wasn't to keep people out, but to work hand-in-hand with international and national refugee organizations to help move people quickly through the camps and get them to communities that were waiting to welcome them to their new homes."

Meanwhile, poor people around the world continue to pay a huge price for U.S. wars. During U.S. military actions abroad cities, countries and whole populations suffer, while stoking greater anger and encouraging the recruitment of new generations of anti-U.S. fighters. Even in the earliest years of the Global War on Terror, U.S. military officials recognized that military invasion and occupation created more terrorism than it ended. Just two years into the occupation of Iraq, a senior official of the U.S. National Intelligence Council acknowledged that the war had already become "a training and recruitment ground, and an opportunity [for terrorists] to enhance their technical skills."

The wars also perpetuate racism, as soldiers are trained to view all inhabitants of the war theater as their "enemy," and racist campaigns at home are designed to build public support for what "our troops" are doing to "them." According to Michael McPhearson, Executive Director of Veterans for Peace, who fought in the 1991 Gulf War, "You grow up being taught that killing is wrong. Then you're also taught that there are certain people who need to be killed." McPhearson continues to describe the moral crisis this creates among military service members: "When you find out that what you've been taught about people in foreign lands or people in other places is not true, when you find out that the same economic or social forces that are impacting your community, whether it be that you are a Black person or a poor person or whatever, are also impacting those people's communities, and that you really have a lot more in common with them than not, then you realize that a lot of the policies that you're helping to underpin and forward are not good for your community nor the people that you're sent to fight....You realize that you're not really standing on stable moral ground as a soldier. And I do believe that there's something called moral injury. We've talked about post-traumatic stress, but people come back home and they come to these realizations. It is hard to reconcile. So then you have to speak up. You have to if you really want to follow a moral path and follow what you've been taught as a child. You really have no choice but to speak out and resist."

During the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, troops often faced the loss of that "moral path." In the 2008 Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan hearings sponsored by Iraq Veterans Against the War, former Marine machine gunner Jon Michael Turner testified that "On April 18, 2006, I had my first confirmed kill. This man was innocent. I don't know his name. I called him 'the fat man.' He was walking back to his house, and I shot him in front of his friend and his father. The first round didn't kill him, after I had hit him up here in his neck area. And afterwards he started screaming and looked right into my eyes. So I looked at my friend, who I was on post with, and I said, 'Well, I can't let that happen.' So I took another shot and took him out. He was then carried away by the rest of his family. It took seven people to carry his body away. We were all congratulated after we had our first kills, and that happened to have been mine. My company commander personally congratulated me, as he did everyone else in our company. This is the same individual who had stated that whoever gets their first kill by stabbing them to death will get a four-day pass when we return from Iraq." Turner began his searing testimony by stripping his medals and ribbons from his chest and tossing them away.

While many veterans are able to find spaces of resistance or otherwise address this moral crisis, others are unable to manage on their own, falling into substance abuse and patterns of violence against themselves and their families. This has escalated into a suicide epidemic in the military. In 2012, a disturbing trend emerged where suicide was claiming more military deaths than military action. More than half of these were in the Army. This precipitated a comprehensive report by the Veterans' Administration on suicide among U.S. veterans. The study found that in 2014, the risk of suicide among veterans was 22 percent higher than among U.S. civilian adults. By September 2017, the VA was still reporting an average of 20 veterans dying by suicide each day.

A Soldier's Heart

Jacob George, a farmer from Arkansas, served as a paratrooper in Afghanistan and a peace activist who co-founded Afghan Veterans Against the War Committee. He composed the song "Soldier's Heart" about the moral injustice facing veterans:

Now, I'm just a farmer from Arkansas.
There's a lot of things I don't understand,
Like why we send farmers to kill farmers
In Afghanistan.
Now I did what I was told
For my love of this land,
And I come home a shattered man
With blood on my hands.
And now I can't have a relationship,
I can't hold down a job.
Oh, while some may say I'm broken,
I call it a soldier's heart.
Because every time I go outside,
I've got to look her in the eyes,
Oh, and knowing that she broke my heart,
And turned around and lied.
Oh, I said red, white and blue,
I trusted in you,
And you never even told me why.

Jacob George ended his life in 2014 after learning that the U.S. would be escalating its military efforts against ISIS.

WE MUST MAKE IT CLEAR THAT WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE SURVIVAL OF THE WORLD.

— THE REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., DECEMBER 1967

ECOLOGICAL DEVASTATION

WHEN THESE CORPORATIONS ARE IN CONTROL OF WATER, THEN NO ONE IS GOING TO BE ABLE TO HAVE ACCESS TO IT. THEY TAKE IT OVER IN POOR COMMUNITIES FIRST, BECAUSE THEY FEEL THERE WILL BE LESS RESISTANCE AND THE POOR DON'T HAVE AS MUCH OF A VOICE. BUT ULTIMATELY, WHAT THEY ARE TALKING ABOUT IS SINISTER AND IT'S GOING TO IMPACT EVERYBODY.

- CATHERINE FLOWERS, ALABAMA CENTER FOR RURAL ENTERPRISE, 2018

This chapter provides a critical piece of the narrative that was not at the forefront of political consciousness at the time of the 1968 Poor People's Campaign. The U.S. political and economic system is not just based on systemic racism, poverty, and a militarized war economy. It also allows corporations to profit from the destruction of Earth's vital life support systems. It allows the fossil fuel, chemical, and other industries to poison the air, water, and land humans depend on to live healthy lives—or to live, period. And those people and communities who are experiencing racism, poverty, and a militarized society have borne the brunt of the pollution that is the inevitable consequence of the elevation of profit over people and planet.

To put things in global perspective, worldwide, pollution caused an estimated 9 million premature deaths (16 percent of all deaths) in 2015. According to the Lancet Commission, this was "three times more deaths than from AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria combined and 15 times more than from all wars and other forms of violence." Water pollution alone is responsible for 1.8 million deaths worldwide every year. While poor countries are the worst affected, pollution-related illnesses are most prevalent among the poorest and most marginalized people in all countries.

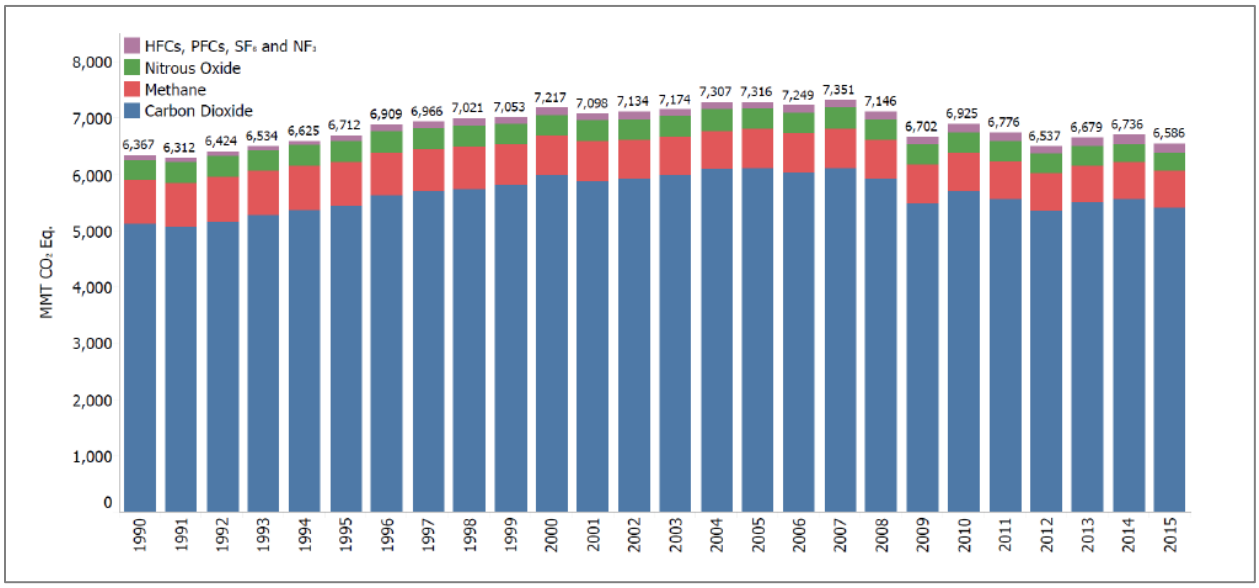
Constraints of time and space have not permitted coverage of all of the intersections of environmental injustices with race, poverty, and the war economy/militarism. This chapter discusses some critical intersections that help understand how environmental devastation is intertwined with race, class, gender, and other inequalities, and with the militarization of the U.S. economy and society.

Section I: Greenhouse Gases

Scientists have known for decades that human activities, particularly the use of fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and gas, are warming the planet. In spite of knowing the risks, political leadership has dragged its feet on implementing solutions. U.S. greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions peaked in 2007, 19 years after NASA scientist James Hansen warned Congress on their impact. This reveals how little priority our political leadership attaches to an existential threat that, for now, mostly impacts poor people, people of color, and people in the Global South. And it shows the political clout of the fossil fuel industry, which has effectively captured the U.S. political system and prevented the kind of drastic action the country should have taken long ago to prevent the crisis of climate change from escalating to the level it has reached today.

Figure 4.1

Historical Trend of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions, 1990-2015

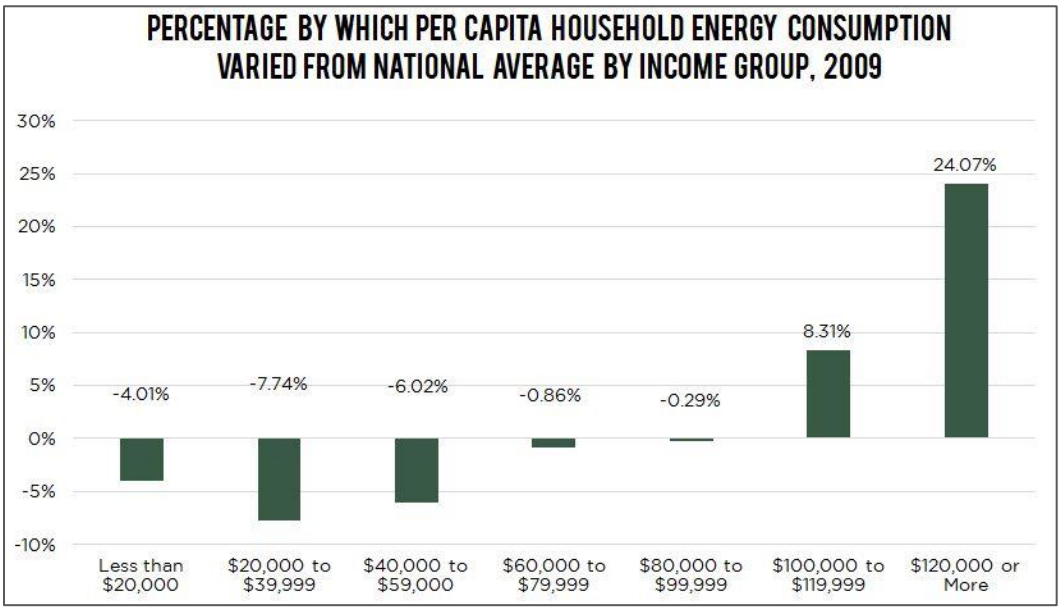


Source: Environmental Protection Agency.

The political power of the fossil fuel industry and the consequent governmental inaction on climate change are a vivid illustration of how racial, economic, and other forms of inequality are *structural* and *institutionalized* in the U.S. political system. Only a system rooted in inequality would allow a wealthy elite to profit from a business model that threatens the future of most of humanity, including marginalized populations in this country. In that sense, climate change is caused by systemic economic, social, and political inequality. Likewise, the effects of climate change, such as water scarcity in some regions and superstorms and floods in others, extreme heat, and sea level rise, have unequal impacts.

The people who suffer the most from the effects of climate change contribute the least to its causes. Figure 4.2 below illustrates that, on average, low-income households in the U.S. consume much less energy per capita than high-income households, and are therefore responsible for less greenhouse gas pollution.

Figure 4.2



Source: Energy Information Administration

A Multiplier of Injustice, an interview with Jacqui Patterson, Director of the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program

As someone with a long history in movements for environmental justice, what is your view on the long-term trends in community responses to ecological damage in the U.S.?

Historically, communities assailed by environmental injustice, such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) or industrial hog farming, were fighting their own battles without support from "environmental groups." Even though these were environmental crises, you have a history of environmental groups working on more traditional "conservation," and not working with these communities.

Over time these groups have come together a bit more, which can sometimes be positive, as we saw with the nationwide solidarity with the water struggle in Flint, Michigan. (See box on Flint water crisis.)

We've also seen the objectification of the struggles of frontline communities, by groups that sometimes have other interests. Let's say a large environmental organization wants to reduce greenhouse gases, and there's a facility emitting greenhouse gases and other toxins that are harming a community, and the organization rallies the community against the facility, and then reaches a "deal" to close down the facility in 5 years. So for 5 more years, the facility emits more cancer-causing chemicals and more people die. Meanwhile, the organization gets to check a box to say there is an "announced retirement" for the plant to satisfy their funder.

You often describe climate change as a multiplier of injustice. Can you elaborate on that?

Take the injustice of oil refineries being right in the middle of Latinx and Black communities in Houston, so already you have these toxic conditions that folks are living under, and then you have Hurricane Harvey coming through and really causing double jeopardy for those communities. Because of the hurricane, those toxins are everywhere and a lot more invasive. Likewise, communities already facing unemployment have more to lose when a disaster harms the infrastructure, and the jobs that are most insecure are the ones that aren't going to bounce back. So you have people already living in poverty and then a disaster happens and exacerbates the situation.

Part of the premise of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival is to connect poverty, racism, the war economy/militarism, and environmental devastation. The intersections of environmental injustice and poverty and race are well documented. What are the connections between the war economy/militarism and environmental injustice?

A good illustration is how nuclear weapons plants are located disproportionately in communities of color and low-income communities. The nuclear weapons plant in Savannah, Georgia, emits radio-nuclides which are disproportionately impacting Black women because of being an endocrine disruptor. Whether it's the ways we are producing weapons or the wars that have roots in resource conflicts around energy, water, etc., we see militarism and environmental injustice being linked.

Section II: The Water Crisis

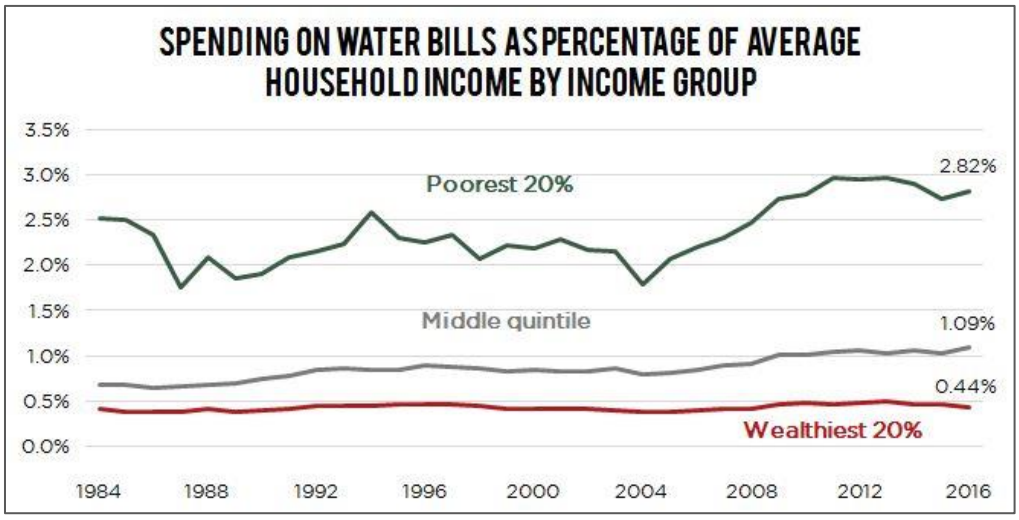
Water has become a critical measure of justice and equity in the United States today, both as an essential resource for human survival and as a threat to human life and property. Poor people face crises of water affordability, water pollution, and in some parts of the country, water scarcity exacerbated by climate change. Meanwhile, in some parts of the country, poor people and people of color face the worst impacts of ongoing sea level rise caused by climate change, as well as catastrophic events like hurricanes and flooding also partly attributable to climate change.

Our economic and political system makes even a necessity such as water unaffordable, inaccessible, and unsafe for millions, for the benefit of privatization profiteers and polluters. It also exposes millions to the risks of water scarcity in some regions, and flooding in others, for the benefit of the fossil fuel industry. The short-term profits of the wealthy and powerful are prioritized over the long-term needs of communities by design.

Affordability and Accessibility of Safe Water

The poorest 20 percent of U.S. households on average spend 2.8 percent of their income on water bills, up from 2.5 percent in 1984 (Figure 4.3). The wealthiest 20 percent spend approximately 0.4 percent of their income on water bills, which has remained essentially unchanged since 1984. The United Nations recommends that, in order to remain affordable, water rates do not exceed 3 percent of household income. However, one study found that 13.8 million low-income households (constituting 11.9 percent of all U.S. households) already spend more than 4.5 percent of their income on water, and the share of U.S. households with unaffordable water bills could triple in the next five years if current projections are unchanged.

Figure 4.3



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey

These national trends come with unjust local impacts, for example in Baltimore, Maryland. The average annual residential water bill of $787.58 in Baltimore today is more than twice the 2009 level ($347.28). Rates are projected to continue increasing such that, by 2022, the average residential bill will be more than three times the 2009 level.

To make matters worse, the Baltimore water utility's response to this crisis of affordability makes the situation more inequitable. In 2015 and 2016, the utility shut off water to about 6,600 households, impacting more than 16,000 people, and sold tax liens for about 1,700 homes because of unpaid water bills. A tax lien sale is a process where a city sells the right to collect delinquent taxes or other unpaid charges to private parties in an auction, and the private parties then have the right to file a foreclosure lawsuit to collect the unpaid charges. The city's water bill collection practices are thus directly contributing to foreclosures and homelessness.

Water shut-offs are a disturbing trend unfolding across the country. In Detroit, 27,000 households were disconnected from water service in 2014 for having unpaid bills, drawing criticism from the United Nations Special Rapporteurs for the Human Right to Water and Sanitation and for the Right to Adequate Housing. As Valerie Jean, a mother of five, grandmother of two, and member of Michigan Welfare Rights Organization describes this broadening crisis, "It was one thing to know that you didn't have water and you couldn't afford your water. It's a whole other to find out they shut off your entire community and none of you matter."

While Detroit continues to experience a 12 percent water shut off rate across the city, other parts of the country are faring even worse. According to Mary Grant of Food and Water Watch, some communities in Louisiana and other parts of the south are facing shut off rates of 20 percent or more. Disconnection of water service has been shown to have serious public health impacts, including a higher incidence of acute gastrointestinal illness.

The driving force behind these shut offs are municipal budget deficits that have been prompted by the politics of austerity and privatization. A 2017 report also found that federal assistance to local water systems had fallen 74 percent in inflation-adjusted terms since its peak in 1977, even as pipes are aging and infrastructure investment needs are rising. This leaves water utilities in the difficult position of choosing between not making the needed investments, or making the investments and raising rates to recover costs. The problems are more acute in economically depressed areas where a combination of low household incomes and declining populations reduce revenues from ratepayers, worsening the financial picture for water utilities.

Sometimes, utilities under financial pressure are pushed to privatize their water systems in response, in the mistaken belief that an injection of private capital will solve the underlying problems. However, private water utilities have a strong financial incentive to raise rates even as they reduce costs by providing inferior service. Large privatized water systems, on average, charge 59 percent more per unit of water than large publicly owned systems. These costs are falling disproportionately on low-income households and create a system of regressive user fees for water services.

Poor rural communities face the additional problem of often lacking access to piped water and sewage systems in the first place. A 2016 study shows that, while only about 0.5 percent of the U.S. population lacked access to complete plumbing, the corresponding percentages are 0.45 percent for White people, 0.78 percent for Black people, 1 percent for Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, and 2.89 percent for Native Americans and Alaskan Natives. Of the top 20 counties in the U.S. by percentage of households lacking access to complete plumbing, 13 counties had a majority Native American or Alaskan Native population. Fourteen of these counties had 10 percent or more of the population lacking access to complete plumbing. The worst affected areas were all rural, and on average, the percentage of rural households without access to plumbing infrastructure was twice the percentage of urban households without access.

An ongoing public health crisis in rural Lowndes County, Alabama, has brought national attention to these inequalities in access to water and sanitation. Lowndes County has a median household income of $27,914 (little more than half the U.S. median household income of $55,322) and is 74.6 percent Black.

Lowndes County native Catherine Flowers, a military veteran and founder of the Alabama Center for Rural Enterprise, estimates that 80 percent of the county's residents do not have access to public sewage systems and have to dispose of their own sewage. In some cases, they are legally required to do so. However, according to Flowers, a septic tank system can cost up to $15,000, which is unaffordable for many county residents. These residents often resort to directly piping sewage from their homes and dumping it in open pools outdoors, often in close proximity to their homes. During heavy rains—a phenomenon that will become more prevalent in the American Southeast with climate change—sewage backs up into people's houses. Because septic tanks can overflow and back up during heavy rains as well, even households that can afford them are not always better off.

Besides the daily indignity of living with constant exposure to raw sewage, Lowndes County residents face greater risk of disease as a result of the lack of sanitation. A recent study shows that hookworm, a parasite associated with poor countries in the Global South and thought to have been eradicated in the U.S., has reappeared in Lowndes County.

Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty, visited Lowndes County last year to document the incidence of extreme poverty in one of the world's richest countries. His preliminary findings report that: "In Alabama, I saw various houses in rural areas that were surrounded by cesspools of sewage that flowed out of broken or non-existent septic systems. The State Health Department had no idea of how many households exist in these conditions, despite the grave health consequences. Nor did they have any plan to find out, or devise a plan to do something about it. But since the great majority of White folks live in the cities, which are well served by government built and maintained sewerage systems, and most of the rural folks in areas like Lowndes County, are Black, the problem doesn't appear on the political or governmental radar screen."

Another particularly dangerous water safety issue is lead contamination. Children can ingest lead from various sources, including drinking water as well as lead paint and contaminated soil. Lead exposure is unsafe for children at any level and even low levels can harm brain development. According to the CDC, at least four million families with children are being exposed to high levels of lead and approximately half a million U.S. children under six have blood lead levels above the level at which CDC recommends public health actions.

The Flint Water Crisis

In 2014, the city of Flint, Michigan, was under the control of an unelected "emergency manager" when the city decided to switch its water source from the Detroit Water System to the Flint River. This move poisoned the city, a community of almost 99,000 with a 42 percent poverty rate and in which 54 percent of residents are Black and 40 percent White.

Flint residents have struggled for decades with the human costs of deindustrialization and divestment, which have undermined the city's physical infrastructure and tax base. Like many U.S. cities, Flint has a legacy of lead piping and soldered lead joints in its water system. Nationwide, the prevalence of lead pipes is unknown, but estimated to be widespread.

The Flint River was also highly polluted, and Flint authorities failed to treat the water properly by removing contaminants and adding anti-corrosive agents. Consequently, pollutants in the water corroded the pipes, leaching lead into the water.

Shortly after switching water sources, General Motors (GM) complained that the water was rusting its car parts. GM was permitted by the city to return to the Detroit Water System. However, when Flint residents complained about foul odor and taste, as well as suspicious behavioral and health problems, the authorities dismissed their complaints. It took a year and a half for authorities to acknowledge that there was a problem with the water and switch back to using Detroit water. Adding insult to injury, the City of Flint sent thousands of residents disconnection notices for unpaid bills for poisoned water.

The fact that Flint is a poor, majority Black city and under Emergency Management rather than democratic representation evidently made its residents' concerns easier for authorities to ignore.

Emergency management forces cities to prioritize balanced budgets and repayments to Wall Street lenders over human lives. It neutralizes democratic processes, and ignores local impacts of public policy. (See section on Coastal Impacts below for similar policies forced upon Puerto Rico.) Under emergency management in Flint, saving money outweighed the environmental destruction of a city and the poisoning of its residents. Rather than empowering families already denied equal opportunity, emergency management concentrates the costs of decades of divestment onto them, as well as the water they drink, the air that they breathe, and the land that they live on. As Claire McClinton from the Flint Democracy Defense League says, "They could not take our water away without taking our democracy first."

In the wake of these multiple crises, Flint residents began organizing on the ground. Water You Fighting For and the Flint Democracy Defense League were prominent voices in this resistance force, which articulated three demands: extending Medicare for all people impacted by the water crisis, eliminating the office of the Emergency Manager in Flint, and declaring the city a disaster zone to access more federal funds to replace their water system.

Water Pollution

Mainland Gas and Oil Production and Transportation

While there is failing infrastructure in poor cities and counties across the country, there has been a boom in infrastructure to support oil and gas production and transportation. Fracking, the process whereby water, sand, and chemicals are injected into rock formations to extract natural gas and oil, has become widespread in the past 15 years. Fracking has in fact driven U.S. domestic oil and gas production. Total U.S. natural gas production grew only 3.7 percent between 1970 and 2007, but then grew 34.5 percent from 2007 to 2017. Because of this fracking boom, the United States is now the world's largest producer of both oil and natural gas.

This has come at an immense cost to the environment and to exposed populations. Fracking uses large quantities of water—up to 13 million gallons per well in the Eagle Ford region of Texas—a major concern in regions where freshwater is scarce and likely to become even more scarce due to climate change. Fracking also contaminates both groundwater and surface water. Proximity to fracking wells is associated with negative health effects, including congenital heart defects, high-risk pregnancies, premature births, asthma, cancer, and neurological illnesses. It also releases large quantities of methane, a more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

The dangers of fracking have been well-known for some time, but "regulatory capture" by oil and gas interests enabled fracking to grow unchecked. Congress and the EPA ignored evidence of fracking-related water contamination from independent scientists and EPA whistleblowers and exempted fracking operations from a number of environmental laws.

More generally, the pipeline infrastructure required to transport oil and gas that is produced in the U.S. poses serious threats to the climate, water quality, and public health, through leakage as well as catastrophic spills. Between 1998 and 2017, there were 5,712 significant oil and gas leaks or ruptures on U.S. pipelines, causing 307 fatalities, injuring 1,263 more, and costing $8.0 billion in damages. These incidents also released toxic chemicals in soil, waterways, and air. The proximity of pipelines to freshwater sources is particularly dangerous, since leaks of pollutants into water can spread large distances and affect drinking water sources for downstream communities. For example, a 2010 oil pipeline spill in Michigan carried pollutants 35 miles downstream on the Kalamazoo River and resulted in the water treatment system for the Village of Romeoville, Michigan, being shut down temporarily because of water safety concerns. Research has shown that groundwater contamination from pipeline spills can persist for decades.

Pipelines also often pass close to low-income communities and communities of color, including Native American nations. This has led to historic protest movements opposing the controversial Dakota Access and Keystone XL pipelines, which have evolved into broad movements demanding indigenous sovereignty.

The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) is a planned pipeline with a capacity of 570,000 barrels a day, intended to carry oil extracted through fracking in North Dakota. Studies indicate that this oil may be more volatile than most crude oil, and therefore more susceptible to explosion and fire risk.

Initially, plans for the pipeline had it passing through Bismarck, North Dakota, a town that is 91 percent White and has a median household income of $60,320, greater than the U.S. median household income of $55,322. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers decided to reroute the pipeline next to the Standing Rock Sioux Nation, where the poverty rate in the Standing Rock Sioux Nation was 43 percent in 2012, or almost three times the rate for the U.S. as a whole.

The adverse impacts of the pipeline on the people of Standing Rock extend beyond measurable economic and ecological impacts to encompass issues of indigenous sovereignty, religious freedom, and cultural self-determination. The pipeline route traverses areas sacred to the Sioux peoples, "rich in history," and "rich in cultural and religious significance," according to a court filing. However, as the Tribal Government explains in the court filing, the Corps of Engineers process for determining the impact of the pipeline construction on historically and culturally significant sites excluded members of the Tribe from meaningful participation. Repeated attempts by the Tribal Government to intervene in the process were ignored. The U.S. government's actions fit into a long pattern of intentionally depriving indigenous peoples of their rights.

At the same time, there are grassroots and indigenous connections being made across the geography of these pipelines. The path of the DAPL crosses from North Dakota through the Midwest to the Gulf Coast of Louisiana. There, indigenous community members and activists have attempted to block this last leg of the DAPL by purchasing a swath of land along the proposed route of the pipeline. Cherri Foytlin is an indigenous environmental activist from Louisiana and mother of five who has been working with communities along the Gulf Coast from Florida to Texas. As she explains, "This pipeline will go through Bayou Lafourche, which provides drinking water for at least 300,000 people, including the United Houma Nation. Also, a band of the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe that live on the Isle de Jean Charles are the first domestic climate refugees. Native American communities are getting pushed to the end of the earth in Louisiana. They're losing their culture again. People can't do what they grew up doing, they are no longer free. We bought 11 acres of land that we're hoping the pipeline will try and run through. We're committed to holding that space and banding together with others who are having their land expropriated."

Offshore Oil Drilling and Spills

Offshore drilling presents a separate and grave threat to coastal communities through catastrophic oil spills. Between 1964 and 2015, there were 2,441 spills from offshore oil drilling operations in U.S. territorial waters, discharging almost 5.2 million barrels (218 million gallons) of oil. Of these spills, 17 were of 1,000 barrels or more. The 4.9 million barrel Deepwater Horizon "BP oil" spill off the coast of Louisiana in 2010 was responsible for almost 95 percent of all oil spilled in all U.S. offshore drilling operations between 1964 and 2015. It was also the largest oil spill in the entire history of offshore oil drilling worldwide.

The spill started with an explosion, killing 11, on British Petroleum's Deepwater Horizon drilling platform on April 20, 2010, and was not successfully capped until July 15, 2010. The 87-day period that it took to finally cap the well shows the inherent risk in offshore oil operations. In its 2011 report to the President, the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling observed, "The technology, laws and regulations, and practices for containing, responding to, and cleaning up spills lag behind the real risks associated with deepwater drilling into large, high-pressure reservoirs of oil and gas located far offshore and thousands of feet below the ocean's surface."

Ecosystem impacts of the spill included death and impairment of large numbers of fish, birds, and other ocean life, and massive coral bleaching (a precursor to coral reef collapse). Between 600,000 and 800,000 birds died, and migratory pelicans took the toxic residues with them all the way to Minnesota. As the oil slick washed up on shore, beaches and wetlands were damaged.

The spill also had serious public health impacts on emergency response and cleanup workers, and on coastal communities more generally. Initially, cleanup workers were not provided with personal protective equipment guidelines, and up to 50,000 workers were exposed to chemicals that damage lung tissue.

Economic impacts on fishing and tourism dependent communities are estimated to reach $8.7 billion by 2020, costing 22,000 jobs. At its peak, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) closed as much as 37 percent of the Gulf fishing zone because of toxicity concerns, seriously affecting the livelihood of people dependent on fishing, shrimping, and oyster farming. A large segment of the Gulf Coast fishing community are immigrants from Vietnam and Cambodia. Native American communities such as the United Houma Nation also faced a disproportionate impact from the loss of fishing livelihoods.

Seen in this light, the U.S. government's recent decision to allow offshore oil drilling along about 90 percent of U.S. coasts is nothing short of reckless. The offshore drilling plan highlights once again how private profit often overrides every other consideration in government decisions.

Coal Ash Spills

Another serious water pollution impact from the fossil fuel life cycle is the threat of toxins from coal ash, the solid residue from coal combustion, entering surface water and groundwater. Coal ash contains heavy metals and other carcinogenic pollutants, and is stored in surface pits or ponds.

The Sierra Club estimates that there are 1,100 coal ash sites throughout the U.S., and power plants produce about 140 million tons of coal ash a year. The toxins from coal ash can gradually leach into water bodies and groundwater, or get released in catastrophic spills, both of which pose threats to water quality.

A particularly egregious coal ash spill with long-lasting effects occurred in Martin County, Kentucky, a rural county with a median household income of $29,052, which is barely more than half of the nationwide median household income. Martin County is facing a water emergency that has been escalating since a massive coal sludge spill by the Massey Energy Company in 2000. Massey was fined $5,600 for the spill, amounting to less than 2 cents for every 1,000 gallons of coal sludge that was spilled. Meanwhile, residents have experienced water outages, low water pressure and discolored water that smells of chemicals or sewage for years. In January 2018, some households were without water for nearly three weeks. Despite the widespread poverty, the Martin County Water District is proposing a 49.5 percent rate hike. The current as well as the proposed rate structure charges commercial users less per gallon than what households pay for failing water service.

Massey Energy, the company responsible for the spill, is no stranger to controversy. It operated the Upper Big Branch Mine in West Virginia, where a 2010 explosion took the lives of 29 miners, making it the worst mine disaster in decades. Federal investigators had charged the company with safety violations numerous times, but evidently, the company found it cheaper to cut corners on safety. The CEO of Massey Energy, Don Blankenship, was convicted of conspiracy to willfully violate mine health and safety standards and sentenced to one year in jail and a $250,000 fine—a small price to pay for knowingly endangering lives to save money.

In an illustration of the grotesque inequalities in our political system, a completely unrepentant Blankenship is now running for the U.S. Senate in West Virginia.

Superfund Sites

The long history of environmentally destructive practices in the U.S. has left a legacy of severely contaminated sites. In 1980, Congress enacted the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), commonly known as Superfund, mandating a process for remediation of the most severely contaminated sites.

The residual contaminants from these historically polluted sites are mostly found in the soil, surface water, and groundwater. Toxins in groundwater, in turn, can migrate into surface water, and impact the safety of drinking water.

The demographics of the population living in close proximity to these Superfund sites shows how environmental contamination intersects with racial, economic, and other forms of inequality. A 2015 EPA analysis found that the population within three miles of highly contaminated "Superfund" sites was 45.7 percent non-White, significantly higher than their 36.7 percent share of the U.S. population. Families in which the adults speak limited or no English made up 12.3 percent of households within three miles of the sites, compared to just 8.6 percent in the U.S. population as a whole. While people of color are disproportionately exposed relative to their share of the overall population, the population within three miles of Superfund sites is still majority White.

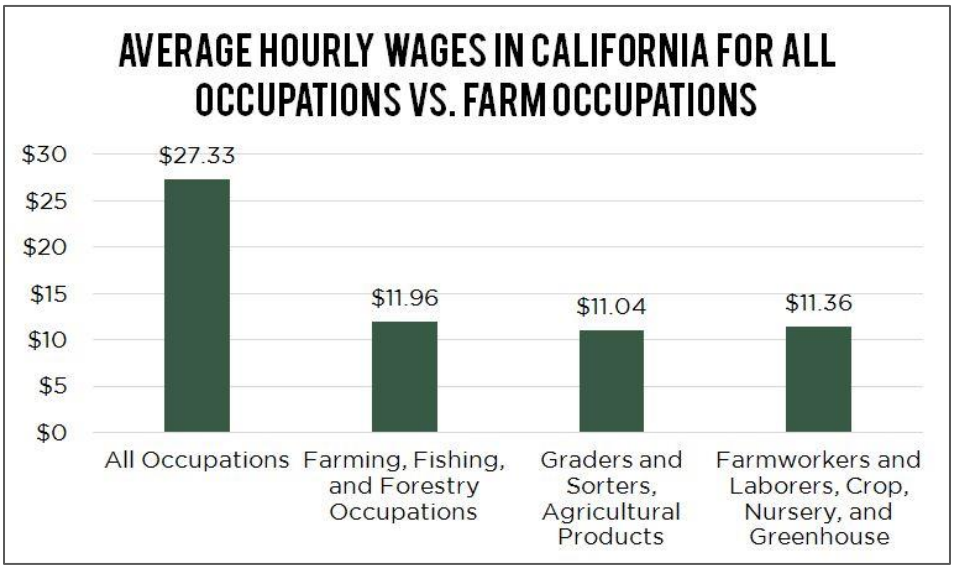
Water Scarcity

As the world warms, certain regions, including the Western United States, are experiencing water scarcity and facing a longer-term threat of "chronic, long-duration hydrological drought."

Water scarcity has devastating socioeconomic impacts, particularly on rural communities with an agriculture-dependent economy. One study estimated that the 2015 California drought caused losses of $2.74 billion and cost nearly 21,000 jobs, accounting for both direct impacts on agriculture and indirect impacts on other sectors (for example, industries that provide goods and services to agriculture). The direct agricultural jobs impact alone was about 10,100 jobs, almost 5 percent of California's employment of 215,000 in agricultural occupations.

The average hourly wage of all agricultural workers in California, and of the two largest agricultural occupations, are compared to statewide average hourly wage for all occupations in Figure 4.4. Job losses in agriculture affect low-wage workers who are least able to afford extended periods of joblessness.

Figure 4.4



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Hourly wages do not provide the full picture of farmworker poverty, because a majority of farm work is seasonal. Nationwide, about 60 percent of farmworkers are seasonal, and 23 percent have a family income below the Federal poverty threshold. Almost three-quarters (72 percent) of farmworkers are foreign-born, with 68 percent born in Mexico and 3 percent born in Central America. This low-wage, vulnerable, majority Latinx immigrant workforce will bear the brunt of loss of livelihoods from water scarcity in the Western U.S.

Coastal Impacts: Sea Level Rise, Storms and Floods

A warming world causes sea levels to rise, for reasons that include melting of land-based glaciers in the Arctic and Antarctic, and the thermal expansion of water. On average, the global average sea level has risen about 7-8 inches since 1900, and is expected to rise between 4 ft. and 8 ft. by 2100. A 2014 study estimates that 3.6 million people in the U.S. live in areas that will be submerged by a 4 ft. sea level rise, and 9.8 million people live in areas that will be submerged by an 8 ft. sea level rise.

Already, indigenous Alaskans are seeing their villages sinking into the sea, threatening their culture and way of life. These are low income communities, often without access to running water and flush toilets. In a telling sign of how such communities are treated by the U.S. political system, the federal government proposes eliminating the meager $19.9 million in funding to assist these communities with relocation and adaptation, even as it provides $20 billion annually in subsidies to the fossil fuel companies whose business model is literally drowning these ancestral lands.

A rising sea will also inevitably worsen the impact of catastrophic events such as hurricanes, since the resulting storm surges will extend further inland, affecting larger populations and more infrastructure. High rainfall and high wind speeds are a serious threat to human life and health, and to essential infrastructure. The intensity and frequency of hurricanes and the amount of associated rainfall are projected to increase in a warming world.

As with other environmental crises, the impacts are unequal in racial and income terms. When Hurricane Harvey hit Houston, the Exxon refinery in Baytown experienced storm damage leading to leaks of toxic chemicals. Of the two census blocks immediately adjoining the refinery, one is 87 percent non-White and 76 percent low income and the other is 59 percent non-White and 59 percent low income, according to the EPA. The stark racialized injustices perpetuated by the punitive immigration enforcement system were also in evidence during Hurricane Harvey. The Border Patrol continued to operate checkpoints on highways being used by people evacuating from the hurricane-affected zone, so undocumented immigrants had to choose between risking their lives or getting deported.

One of the gravest domestic human rights crises of 2017 was the impact of Hurricane Maria on Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Almost the entire island of Puerto Rico lost access to electricity after the hurricane, and only 43 percent of the island's residents had access to electricity two months after the hurricane, a life-threatening situation for residents who rely on dialysis or oxygen. By way of comparison, about 85 percent of the world's population has access to electricity.

The loss of electricity shut down most hospitals and clinics, with only three major hospitals on the island functioning three days after the hurricane. The loss of electricity also shut down water and sanitation systems. The Federal response was excruciatingly slow, with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) stretched thin by having to respond to multiple disasters (Harvey in Texas, Irma in Florida, and then Maria) in short order. It took a full week for FEMA to start delivering

fresh water to residents of the outlying islands of Vieques and Culebra. (Vieques was the site of a U.S. Navy live weapons testing range that has left a toxic legacy.)

As of October 1, two weeks after Maria, half of Puerto Ricans still did not have access to piped water, and by mid-November, 9 percent of the population (about 300,000 people) did not have their access to water restored. Many people were forced to rely on untreated water from rivers and lakes, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases. While disruption of operations at public health laboratories on the island have made it difficult to track the resulting spike in disease, there have been 121 cases of leptospirosis and four fatalities from it since the hurricane, compared to a usual rate of about 60 cases annually.

Internet access in Puerto Rico was nonexistent after the storm, making it impossible for people to communicate with loved ones in the midst of a crisis. It remains a problem for much of the island today.

The public health impact of Maria in Puerto Rico was compounded by a heat wave after the hurricane. Without electricity, residents had no access to air-conditioning, a dangerous situation for elderly people and people with health vulnerabilities. A New York Times analysis indicates as many as 1,052 people may have died as a result of the hurricane.

This disaster occurred against a pre-existing backdrop of disenfranchisement and inequality. The poverty rate in Puerto Rico is 43.5 percent compared to about 13 percent nationwide. Puerto Rico's median household income of $19,606 is barely more than one-third of the U.S. median household income of $55,322.

The delay in restoring essentials such as electricity and water is partly attributable to the poor state of the island's infrastructure, which has not been maintained over a decade worsened by Washington-imposed austerity policies that prioritize payments to lenders over the well being of Puerto Ricans. In 2016, Congress passed a bill called PROMESA that set up a financial control board to restructure Puerto Rico's economy to pay debts to Wall Street. But because Puerto Rico is effectively a colony of the United States, without voting representation in Congress and without the right to vote in Presidential elections, Puerto Ricans had no voice in the creation of this board, and it is not accountable to the Puerto Rican people. Jesús Vázquez of Organización Boricuá, a food sovereignty organization in Puerto Rico, says that, "the control board has a lot of power over us, including the power to eliminate environmental laws, and to sell public land to pay the debt."

Interview with Jesús Vázquez of Organización Boricuá de Agricultura Ecológica

Organización Boricuá works on food sovereignty and agro-ecology in Puerto Rico. It is a member of the international peasant movement La Via Campesina, and the Climate Justice Alliance. Jesús Vázquez describes the relationship between austerity measures, Hurricane Maria, and militarism in Puerto Rico.

"We import approximately 80 percent of our food. Before the hurricanes, we were already facing an economic crisis caused by bad government decisions, corruption, and hedge funds. The hurricanes have been a "crisis inside the crisis," lifting the veil on the pre-existing crisis. But we knew it was there, because we were living it constantly. We've become even more import-dependent because of damage from Hurricane Maria. Agroecological farms had less erosion because they preserved traditional peasant knowledge of how to make farms weather-resistant. For example, because of our African heritage we grow a lot of root vegetables. Before the hurricanes hit, farmers cut branches from those plants, leaving only a stick above ground, which resisted the winds and kept growing. So some farmers were harvesting food shortly after the hurricane. These small farms bounced back faster, but there's no government policy or incentive supporting them. The government supports conventional monoculture farming dependent on external inputs such as genetically modified seeds.

Since the hurricane, we've organized brigades where local activists and international solidarity delegations go to farms to work on the land and help restore the farms and also hold dialogues on issues facing us such as PROMESA, and workshops on agro-ecological practices."

He continues to describe the history of the military in Puerto Rico: "We were subject to the draft, and many Puerto Ricans fought and died in U.S. wars. There are also U.S. bases in Puerto Rico. Half the island of Vieques was used for bomb testing. After a big struggle, the base was closed. But the military left behind a lot of radioactive and other contamination, so the struggle isn't over yet. Vieques has high rates of poverty, unemployment, and cancer. The U.S. military as well as corporations have a history of using Puerto Rico as a testing ground. Agent Orange was first tested in the Puerto Rican rainforest before being sprayed in Vietnam. Biotech companies such as Monsanto and Bayer are using thousands of acres of the best farmland on the island to experiment on genetically modified seeds, even as Puerto Rico has a problem of food insecurity. They're also using a lot of chemicals like Roundup that have been demonstrated by the World Health Organization to be harmful for human health."

After disasters such as Hurricanes Harvey and Maria, communities are faced with the daunting task of rebuilding, which is inherently unequal—and not just because poor people have fewer resources with which to rebuild. Protection against property damage caused by disasters such as hurricanes is mostly available in the form of privately purchased homeowners insurance, and a disproportionate number of low-income people and people of color do not own their homes. Blacks make up just 9 percent of all homeowners and 21 percent of renters, while Native Americans constitute 0.8 percent of homeowners and 1.4 percent of renters.

Section III: Access to Clean Air

Access to clean air is an important indicator of environmental well-being, and low-income people and people of color are disproportionately more likely to have to breathe polluted air on a routine basis.

Polluting facilities such as coal-burning power plants and trash incinerators are disproportionately located in low-income communities with high concentrations of people of color, directly affecting their air quality. For example, combustion of fossil fuels leads to emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) and sulfur dioxide (SO_2), both of which aggravate asthma and other respiratory conditions.

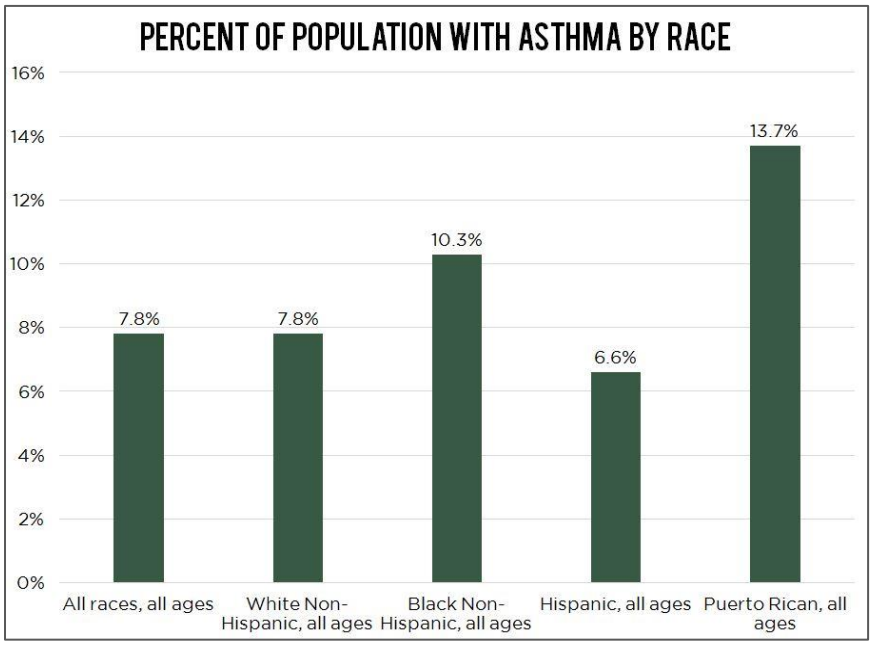
A 2017 report by the NAACP and the Clean Air Task Force documents concrete local examples of these disparities. A particularly egregious example is West Port Arthur, Texas, which has a 95 percent Black population and houses two large oil refineries. Some low-income public housing facilities directly touch the refineries, which routinely emit pollutants linked to cancer, birth defects, and reproductive disorders. EPA data identify West Port Arthur and the county in which it is located as among the worst areas nationally for toxic emissions. Black residents of West Port Arthur have a cancer rate 15 percent higher than the statewide average, and a death rate from cancer 40 percent higher than the statewide average. When Hurricane Harvey hit in 2017, West Port Arthur was one of the hardest-hit communities, again revealing how people who have contributed the least to climate change, while living daily with the adverse side effects of the extractive fossil-fuel economy, often pay the highest price for climate change impacts.

Siting disparities also exist in the location of mountaintop removal coal mining sites in Appalachia. A 2011 study found that the adult poverty rate in Appalachian counties with mountaintop removal mining was 25.4 percent in 2007, compared to a rate of 18.9 percent in the Appalachian region as a whole, and 15.3 percent in Appalachian counties without any mining operations. As noted in the discussion of Superfund sites earlier, while disparity of environmental impacts are in general highly racialized, this does not mean that low-income majority-White communities are safe from the effects of disparate toxic exposure. For example, the mountaintop removal affected community of Naoma, West Virginia, is 97 percent White.

Subsequently, a 2014 study found that the higher concentrations of particulate matter, an airborne pollutant produced during mountaintop removal, is linked to the increased incidence of cardiovascular disease, birth defects, cancer, and mortality in communities located near a mountaintop removal operation. Mountaintop removal mining also contaminates surface water with pollutants such as selenium, iron, and aluminum, and debris from mining has completely blocked over 2,000 miles of streams and headwaters that communities depend on for their drinking water.

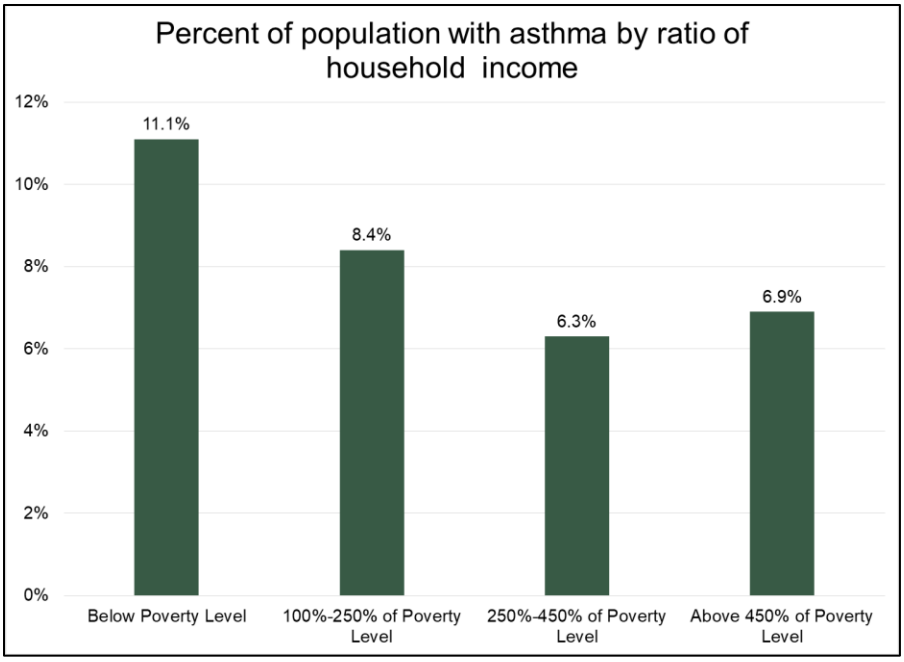
The unequal exposures to harmful environmental impacts by race and income outlined above manifest themselves in starkly unequal health outcomes for poor people and people of color. Asthma has a well established link to atmospheric pollutants.

Figure 4.5



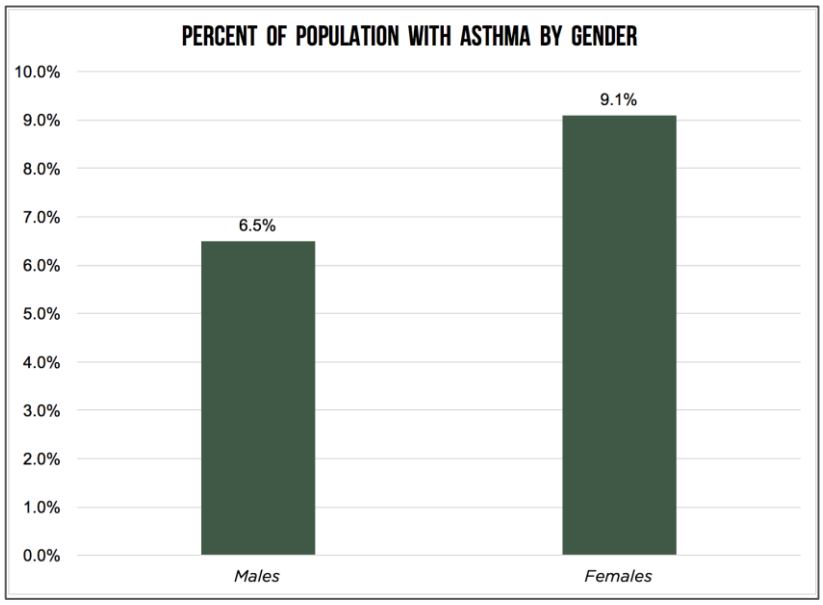
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Figure 4.6



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Figure 4.7



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The higher incidence of asthma among people of color and poor people leads to higher rates of hospitalization (3.4 times higher for Blacks than for Whites) and death (2.9 times higher for Blacks than for Whites). The data show a similar disparity in death rates by gender (1.3 times higher for females than males, and 1.6 times higher for adult women than adult men).

Higher incidence of asthma among children leads to more absences from school, and consequently, poorer educational outcomes for children of color as compared to their White counterparts. Similarly, lower income people lose proportionally more workdays because of asthma-related hospitalization than higher income people, leading to greater economic insecurity for a population working in low-wage jobs, and often lacking access to paid sick days.

In addition to air quality and health impacts, the proximity of communities of color and low-income communities to polluting facilities adversely impacts property values in these communities. Consequently, property tax revenue decreases, leading to less funding for public schools in these communities.

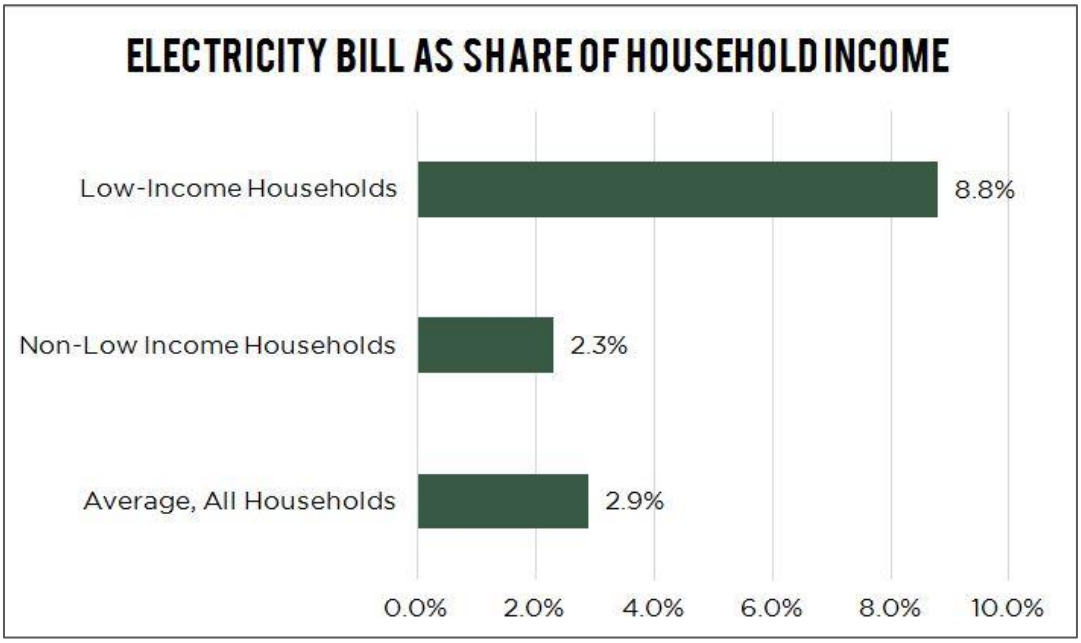
The far-reaching impacts of air quality on childhood health, educational outcomes, and property values (and consequently, community wealth) illustrate how our economic and political system is designed to produce adverse outcomes for poor people and people of color, that keep them locked in an oppressive reality. This example also shows how systemic problems need systemic solutions—one cannot effectively address childhood asthma, educational disparities, and community wealth disparities in isolation from each other.

Section IV: Extreme Heat

As a consequence of climate change, extreme heat waves are expected to increase in frequency and intensity, resulting in increased deaths. Low-income people and people of color are more exposed to conditions exacerbating the risks of extreme heat, such as living in urban areas without adequate green space and other infrastructure disparities. Blacks are 52 percent more likely than Whites to be exposed to heat risk, and the corresponding numbers for Asian Americans and Latinx are 32 percent and 21 percent.

Populations with limited access to air-conditioning are more vulnerable, because they are less able to mitigate extreme heat. Low-income households already pay a disproportionate share of their income on electricity bills compared to higher income households (Figure 4.8), and may in the future have to choose between paying to keep the air-conditioning running, which could be a life-and-death issue, and paying for food. Already, there is a crisis of utility disconnections affecting low income communities and communities of color.

Figure 4.8



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Section V: The Climate Change Impact of the U.S. Military

In 2016, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) was responsible for emitting greenhouse gases equivalent to 66.4 million metric tons of carbon dioxide, which was 72 percent of the U.S. government's total emissions of 91.7 million metric tons.

Despite this, the DoD is allowed to exempt its emissions from its overseas operations from the U.S. government's emissions reduction goals (which means that the U.S. military's emissions from overseas operations are not counted towards the U.S. government's total emissions). In 2016, these exempted emissions accounted for the majority of DoD emissions (37.3 million metric tons, or 56 percent).

The history of how this exemption came about is instructive. The U.S. negotiators for the 1997 Kyoto climate talks insisted on this exemption, and obtained it, at the urging of the military. Now, all militaries worldwide are exempted from counting their emissions from overseas operations in their respective nations' emissions reduction goals. To add insult to injury, the U.S. withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol in 2002.

It is also noteworthy that the most destructive operations of the U.S. military—their overseas operations, which include devastating wars and military bases that are an affront to other countries' sovereignty—are precisely the operations that are exempted.

As extreme fossil fuel extraction multiplies under the current administration, along with gross inequalities in the resulting pollution and public health impacts, and as climate disasters such as hurricanes and forest fires grow in frequency and intensity, there will be an inevitable escalation of social movements led by frontline communities, demanding justice, dignity, and even the right to survive. These movements led by frontline communities represent humanity's best hope of building a future where everyone has access to clean water and clean air, and everyone gets to live in healthy, just communities.

How Militarism of Law Enforcement Enables Ecological Devastation

The overfunding of the U.S. military has contributed to a creeping militarization of the entirety of American society. One example of this militarization is the transfer of surplus military equipment to state and local law enforcement agencies at low cost (and sometimes for free). Consequently, local law enforcement agencies are now armed with night vision goggles, body armor, and even mine-resistant armored trucks with ambush protection.

These are weapons of war — which raises the question, who are these police departments going to war with? A part of the answer is that they are using these weapons to intimidate and terrorize peaceful protesters, whether it's Black Lives Matter protesters in Ferguson, Missouri, or water protectors in Standing Rock.

The growing militarization of law enforcement, and their evident willingness to use their military equipment to terrorize peaceful dissent, points to a future where the fossil fuel oligarchy and their political backers will increasingly try to silence opposition to get away with their destructive agenda. In this way, the militarization of law enforcement can enable more environmental injustice by silencing the opposition.

Garett Rappenhagen, an Iraq War veteran who joined the delegation from About Face: Veterans Against the War to Standing Rock, connects this deeply concerning trend to the broader dependence on oil and polluting industries: "Our addiction to fossil fuels in America is so predominant that we have spent an insane amount of military assets to protect it - the drilling, the supply, the trade, and pathways for fossil fuels. And here we are again in another brutal occupation that's not in Iraq or the Middle East, but in our own country, against our own citizens, people who have lived generations before White people arrived, fighting against these same mechanisms, the same corporations, the same government agencies, to try and stop this environmental colonialism. There is a direct relation to my fight in Iraq for oil and these people's fight here against oil...This is something that is not just affecting the natives that live here but this affects all of us and it's going to reach everywhere in the world. And it's going to target poor communities everywhere. These sheriffs and National Guardsman are local, many of them live here in this state and this county. So if the water supply is contaminated their children are going to be drinking poisoned water. [We veterans] feel that we are duty bound to come here and stop it."

CONCLUSION

FREE
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MICHIGAN
WELFARE
RIGHTS
ORGANIZATION
HOUSING
NOT SHELTERS

As the data in this report make clear, the need for transformative action on the issues of systemic racism, systemic poverty, militarism, and ecological destruction is as urgent today as it was in 1968. All Americans—regardless of their race, gender, or class—share a common interest in tackling these systemic problems in order to prevent our democracy, our society, and our planet from destruction. To combat any one of these four problems requires changing the underlying structures that have produced all of them. We need to overcome the silos and other divisions that have splintered social movements and hindered their progress. We also need to raise up the power of the people most affected by these problems to counter those at the top who have rigged the rules in their favor.

In the coming months, the Institute for Policy Studies will continue to work with the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, which is building a state-based moral movement where poor and impacted people are joining together to address these interrelated issues. From May 13, 2018, to June 23, 2018, the Campaign will enter into a season of moral resistance, coordinated across at least 25 states and Washington, D.C. These six weeks will focus on the problems plaguing our society and the brilliant leadership emerging in communities of struggle across the country.

In 1968, Jimmy, a youth participant in the Poor People's Campaign from Marks, Mississippi, testified before the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. "We have to think about changing things, he said, "'cause if we don't, they're going to get worse. Like the air being polluted; you think we want to breathe that? And the water, too—we like to go swimming, and we're going to go swimming…Yes, sir, things are going to be different."

This is the kind of moral courage and clarity arising in this moment, 50 years later, recognizing that things have become worse. From east to west, north to south, in cities and countryside, there is a moral movement afoot with poor and impacted people in the lead. We know from history that when those most impacted by injustice band together with moral leaders, clergy, activists, and all people of conscience—that is when we can make a change. That is when our country gets better for everyone, not just a select few.

Forward together, not one step back!

APPENDIX 1: MAJOR SHIFTS SINCE 1968

In the 50 years between 1968 and 2018, there have been large shifts in the fights to end racism, poverty and inequality, militarism and the war economy, and environmental destruction. There have been periods of progress and periods of retreat. Some of our work today is to learn from and defend what movements before us have won.

1968-1980: The 1968 Poor People's Campaign begins in a period of momentum toward tackling racism, militarism, and poverty, aided by the civil rights movement and the programs of President Johnson's "War on Poverty" (which gave us food stamps, Medicare, Medicaid, and expanded Social Security). Rev. Dr. King, alongside grassroots leaders like Peggy Terry (Jobs or Income Now (JOIN), Chicago); Myles Horton (Highland Folk School, TN); Reies Tijerina (Chicano and Indo-Hispano Movements, New Mexico), Robert Kennedy (New York Senator and Democratic Presidential Candidate), Marian Wright Edelman (Children's Defense Fund), and Johnnie Tillmon (National Welfare Rights Organization) began to organize with poor and marginalized communities across racial and geographic divides to confront the underlying structures that perpetuated misery in their communities. While the U.S. wars in Indochina ramp up military spending and spark a massive anti-war movement, other movements to fight poverty, racism, patriarchy, militarism, and environmental destruction expand. Awareness of planetary limits grows, and regulations are passed to protect the environment. The so-called "war on drugs" ushers in an era of mass incarceration, disproportionately punishing African-Americans, that gives the U.S. the highest incarceration rate in the world.

The 1980s: Under the rhetoric of "free markets," the United States (with Ronald Reagan), the United Kingdom (with Margaret Thatcher), Germany (with Helmut Kohl) and other countries elect conservative governments dedicated to cutting regulations and taxes and increasing military spending. These governments enable corporations to shift operations overseas, weakening the power of unions and government protections. Inequality rises, wages stagnate, and poverty increases. The era of Reagan's "Welfare Queen" mythology ramps up the long-held belief that poor people, especially Black single mothers, are poor due to bad character rather than a regressive distribution of wealth and systemic racism. A growing environmental movement puts climate change on the political map.

1989-1990: There is a brief period when the Berlin Wall topples, when the Soviet bloc that justified massive U.S. military budgets is dismantled, and the United States contemplates a massive shift in priorities. Pundits called it the "peace dividend," and military spending is cut for the first time in years.

The 1990s: In 1990-1991, President George Bush launches the first Gulf War in Kuwait and Iraq, and there are drum beats for war and for new increases in military spending. Then, under eight years of deregulation of the economy with President Clinton, the economy grows but so does inequality. Movements against corporate globalization erupt. But with growth in government and other jobs, the racial income gap narrows and poverty begins to fall. The impact of a cruel welfare reform locks in

the attack on single mothers and Black women by the turn of the century, and poverty rises again in the 2000s. Disparate race and class impacts of environmental destruction begin to get recognition.

2001-2008: As 9-11 stokes Islamophobia and offers the "war on terror" as a new enemy to replace communism, the military budget and deadly new wars expand quickly under eight years of the second President Bush. A global peace movement pulls in movements against poverty, racism, and environmental destruction as millions oppose war. A crushing financial crisis spreads around the globe in 2008-2009.

2009-2016: President Obama is elected into the Great Recession, which destroys the already low wealth of Black and Latinx families and widens the racial wealth gap even as White families are also impacted. There is an increase in the policing of poor people and the resurgence of debtors' prisons. Eight million jobs are destroyed and wages stagnate while Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, the Fight for $15 and other movements for the rights to water, health care, living wages, immigrant rights, women's rights, climate justice and indigenous sovereignty and more flourish. The Moral Mondays/Forward Together movement emerges as a fusion movement in North Carolina. Environmental, LGBTQ, and workers movements win some victories, as the voices of domestic and restaurant workers gain visibility.

2017 onward: President Trump is narrowly brought into office, after record-low voter turnout and losing the popular vote. The White House and congressional Republicans enact a law that slashes taxes on corporations and the wealthy, adding $1.5 trillion to the national debt and endangering funding for Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, and other anti-poverty programs. The bill also repeals part of the Affordable Care Act, which will result in 13 million people losing health insurance. The stock market responds by continuing to grow amid rapidly escalating inequality.

The rich get richer, the poor get prison, newly-won civil rights protections and long-standing voting rights are rolled back, and deportations increase. Women's rights are threatened, wars expand with threats of nuclear war, and the Trump administration begins to stack the courts with conservative judges and dismantle 50 years of hard-won environmental protections. Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria vividly illustrate the profound racial and economic inequalities of climate change impacts. Resistance movements take to the streets with growing cross-movement connections.

APPENDIX 2:
FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN: A CALL FOR NATIONAL MORAL REVIVAL

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE

Poor People's Campaign

A NATIONAL CALL for MORAL REVIVAL

1. We are rooted in a moral analysis based on our deepest religious and constitutional values that demand justice for all. Moral revival is necessary to save the heart and soul of our democracy.
2. We are committed to lifting and deepening the leadership of those most affected by systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, and ecological devastation and to building unity across lines of division.
3. We believe in the dismantling of unjust criminalization systems that exploit poor communities and communities of color and the transformation of the "War Economy" into a "Peace Economy" that values all humanity.
4. We believe that equal protection under the law is non-negotiable.
5. We believe that people should not live in or die from poverty in the richest nation ever to exist. Blaming the poor and claiming that the United States does not have an abundance of resources to overcome poverty are false narratives used to perpetuate economic exploitation, exclusion, and deep inequality.
6. We recognize that the centrality of systemic racism in maintaining economic oppression must be named, detailed and exposed empirically, morally and spiritually. Poverty and economic inequality cannot be understood apart from a society built on white supremacy.
7. We aim to shift the distorted moral narrative often promoted by religious extremists in the nation from issues like prayer in school, abortion, and gun rights to one that is concerned with how our society treats the poor, those on the margins, the least of these, women, LGBTQIA folks, workers, immigrants, the disabled and the sick; equality and representation under the law; and the desire for peace, love and harmony within and among nations.
8. We will build up the power of people and state-based movements to serve as a vehicle for a powerful moral movement in the country and to transform the political, economic and moral structures of our society.
9. We recognize the need to organize at the state and local level—many of the most regressive policies are being passed at the state level, and these policies will have long and lasting effect, past even executive orders. This movement is not from above but below.
10. We will do our work in a non-partisan way—no elected officials or candidates get the stage or serve on the State Organizing Committee of the Campaign. This is not about left or right, Democrat or Republican, but about right and wrong.
11. We uphold the need to do a season of sustained moral direct action as a way to break through the tweets and shift the moral narrative. We are demonstrating the power of people coming together across issues and geography and putting our bodies on the line to the issues that are affecting us all.
12. The Campaign and all its Participants and Endorsers embrace nonviolence. Violent tactics or actions will not be tolerated.

REPAIRERS OF THE BREACH

KAIROS THE CENTER FOR RELIGIONS, RIGHTS, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

www.poorpeoplescampaign.org

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Everyone here, and several others who have not been named, have come together to contribute to a long-overdue conversation on our national priorities. As the Campaign heads into a six-week season of moral resistance in more than 25 states and Washington D.C., the facts, figures and faces contained here will come to life for a nation that has ignored them for far too long.

As Rev. Dr. King recognized in 1967, "there are millions of poor people in this country who have very little or even nothing to lose. If they can be helped to take action together, they will do so with a freedom and a power that will be a new and unsettling force in our complacent national life." This "new and unsettling force" is rising today. It is time to move.

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